PARTISAN REVIEW

FALL, 1955

ANDRÉ MALRAUX
Saint-Just and the Legend of the Revolution

VLADIMIR NABOKOV
On Translating Pushkin

T. A. HSIA
The Jesuit's Tale (a story)

WALTER KAUFMANN
Toynbee and Super-History

AUGUSTA WALKER
Allegory: A Light Conceit

URSULA BRUMM
Berlin Letter

ISAAC ROSENFELD
Wouk: For God and the Suburbs

Poems by Patricia Coombs and Theodore Roethke
Reviews by Richard Chase, Dudley Fitts, Elizabeth Hardwick, Theodore Hoffman, Hilton Kramer, Kathleen Nott

4

$1.00

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

IMPORTANT BOOKS from HARCOURT, BRACE

• • • • •

THE WALKER AND OTHER STORIES

By Patrick O'Brian—From the author of *Testimonies* and *The Catalans*, twenty-five stories that range from the mountains and streams of the British Isles to the Mediterranean coast of France. Patrick O'Brian "has a power of bringing near to the reader . . . savagery and tenderness, beauty and mystery and boldness and dignity. . . . Best of all he writes with passion." —EUDORA WELTY. $3.50

THE FROGS by Aristophanes
An English Version

By Dudley Fitts—Matching the wonderful rowdy spirit of Aristophanes' great comedy, this verse translation has all the wit and verbal facility which Dudley Fitts brought to his recent version of the *Lysistrata*. "The laughter is enormous, of course," as he says in his introduction, "but the poem transcends topicality and fun, and may even have a meaning for our own day." $4.00

MONEY MONEY MONEY

By David Wagoner—"It is a compelling story well told, the sordid characters lit by many flashes of insight in whose flares we can see reflections of our own faces. As a comment on the age in which we have the misfortune to live it is graphic and brilliant."—WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS $3.50

CORTÉS AND MONTEZUMA

By Maurice Collis—"The peculiar merit of this book is that it escapes from the conventional attitudes towards the conquest of Mexico and approaches the subject largely through the way of thought which was natural to the Mexican Indians of those days. . . . The result is that a rattling good historical story has broken into new ground, and Cortés and Montezuma are presented in a newer and more reasonable light."—*The Times Literary Supplement. End-paper maps and 10 illustrations.* $4.00

THE ALCHEMIST'S VOYAGE

By Calvin Kentfield—A Caribbean freighter southward bound from New Orleans . . . an eccentric crew . . . two young seamen who were strangely bound to each other. Calvin Kentfield's first novel is in the vivid and sonorous tradition of Melville and Conrad. $3.95

At all booksellers

HARCOURT, BRACE AND COMPANY
383 Madison Avenue, New York 17, N. Y.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

PARTISAN REVIEW'S

Annual Special Christmas Offer

A SAVING OF $1.50 ON EACH GIFT SUBSCRIPTION

CHRISTMAS RATES

1 one-year subscription (your own or gift) $4.00
Additional one-year subscriptions $2.50

Please add 50 cents for each foreign subscription.

A special gift card, signed with your name in pen and ink, will announce each of your gift subscriptions.

Please use the enclosed reply envelope to send in your order.

This Offer Expires December 31, 1955

PARTISAN REVIEW • 22 East 17th Street • New York 3, N. Y.

WILLIAM GOYEN'S

extraordinary new novel

IN A FARTHER COUNTRY

In which a strange company of people reveal themselves by telling what was never told before. By the author of THE HOUSE OF BREATH. $3.00. **RANDOM HOUSE, N. Y.**

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

YALE BOOKS

A HISTORY OF MODERN CRITICISM

RENE WELLEK

"Knowledge, method, independence, and the benefit of the 'international perspective'—all work together to give us a book that will serve as standard reference to the whole subject or to the work of any individual within it for many decades to come." Mark Schorer, *New York Times*

Volume I
The Later 18th Century $4.50

Volume II
The Romantic Age 5.50

STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS

MELVIN J. FRIEDMAN

A historical development of stream of consciousness, from its first literary use in *Tristram Shandy* and certain writings of Diderot and Rousseau to the present. The author explores its psychological basis and its musical use and gives detailed analyses of literary examples. $4.50

PAINTED LACE

GERTRUDE STEIN

Occasional pieces, these are, written between 1914 and 1937, and brought together with a preface by Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, who comments that Miss Stein's poetry was "a manifestation, through language, of the same tendencies which had been made way for in Cubism, in plastic art." $5.00

AT YOUR BOOKSTORE
YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS
NEW HAVEN 7 CONN

CONTRIBUTORS

T. A. HSIA is Associate Professor of English at Taiwan University, Taipei, Formosa. This is his first story to appear in English.

AUGUSTA WALKER, whose short novel, **Around the Rusty God,** appeared last year, has recently returned to New York from a year abroad.

VLADIMIR NABOKOV, who is well-known for his novels as well as his translations, teaches Russian at Cornell University.

URSULA BRUMM, a young German critic, is living and teaching in the West Zone of Berlin.

HILTON KRAMER is managing editor of the monthly magazine **Arts.**

KATHLEEN NOTT is an English critic and poet, whose critical book **The Emperor's Clothes** was published here last year.

THEODORE HOFFMAN is a young critic and playwright, now teaching at Bard College.

Coming soon in PR:

J. F. Powers, DAWN (a story)

Marguerite Yourcenar, THE HUMANISM OF THOMAS MANN

Joseph Kerman, MOZART AS DRAMATIST

Frank Budgen, FURTHER RECOLLECTIONS OF JAMES JOYCE

Max Scheler, MAN AND HISTORY

Reviews and articles by Lionel Abel, Newton Arvin, R. P. Blackmur, F. W. Dupee, Joseph Frank, Selma Fraiberg, Edwin Honig, Stanley Edgar Hyman, L. D. Lerner, Arthur Mizener, Margarete Susman, Ernst Topitsch, and others.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

DOUBLEDAY ANCHOR BOOKS

15 new titles added to the growing Anchor list

AMERIKA

By Franz Kafka. The adventures of a young traveler in an imaginary America. Kafka's comic masterpiece. 95¢

TRAVELS IN ARABIA DESERTA

By C. M. Doughty. The greatest travel book in the English language. Abridged by Edward Garnett. $1.25

SHAW ON MUSIC

By Bernard Shaw. Selections from *Music in London* and *London Music* by GBS—whom W. H. Auden has described as "probably the greatest music critic who ever lived." 95¢

FIVE STAGES OF GREEK RELIGION

By Gilbert Murray. A classic study of religion from the earliest mythical forms to the triumph of Christianity. 95¢

THE MYTH OF THE STATE

By Ernst Cassirer. A brilliant review of political thought from Plato to Carlyle, Gobineau and Hegel. $1.25

THE VAGABOND and MY MOTHER'S HOUSE

By Colette. Two superbly written works — a childhood recollection and a novel — poignantly reflecting Colette's intensely felt life. 95¢

AN ELIZABETHAN SONGBOOK

The poetry of Shakespeare, John Donne, Ben Jonson and others, set to music by great Elizabethan composers. The music has been edited and arranged for the piano by Noah Greenberg; the poetry edited and introduced by W. H. Auden and Chester Kallman. *An Anchor Original.* $1.25

FIVE COMEDIES OF ARISTOPHANES

Translated by Benjamin Bickley Rogers. *The Birds, The Frogs, The Clouds, The Wasps, Lysistrata.* 95¢

THE WANDERING SCHOLARS

By Helen Waddell. A classic and delightful introduction to the secular Latin poets of the Middle Ages. $1.15

MEANING IN THE VISUAL ARTS
(illustrated)

By Erwin Panofsky. A general introduction to the author's viewpoint and a brilliant examination of life and art in the later middle ages and renaissance, by one of the world's foremost art historians. *An Anchor Original.* $1.45

THE OLD REGIME AND THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

By Alexis de Tocqueville. A new translation by Stuart Gilbert of the classic study of the origins of the French revolution by the author of *Democracy in America.* 95¢

SIX PLAYS OF STRINDBERG

New translations by Elizabeth Sprigge of *The Father, Miss Julie, The Stronger, The Dream Play, The Ghost Sonata,* and *Easter.* $1.25

SELECTED ESSAYS FROM INDIVIDUALISM RECONSIDERED

By David Riesman. Stimulating views of America and Americans by the author of *The Lonely Crowd.* 95¢

THE TALE OF GENJI

By Lady Murasaki. Volume I of the greatest Japanese novel, translated by Arthur Waley. 95¢

THE ANCHOR REVIEW

The first issue of an international review with original articles by André Malraux, David Riesman, W. H. Auden, Cyril Connolly, Alfred Kazin, Ignazio Silone, Denis de Rougement, Gerald Brenan, Arthur Koestler, and others, on art, literature, philosophy, travel and science. *Edited by Melvin J. Lasky.* 95¢

See the entire DOUBLEDAY ANCHOR BOOK line at your bookstore, or write for complete list to

DOUBLEDAY ANCHOR BOOKS
575 Madison Avenue, New York 22, N. Y.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

PARTISAN REVIEW

EDITORS:
William Phillips, Philip Rahv

ASSOCIATE EDITOR:
William Barrett

ASSISTANT EDITOR:
Catharine Carver

CIRCULATION AND BUSINESS MANAGER:
Cynthia Ochshorn

ADVISORY BOARD:
Allan D. Dowling, Sidney Hook,
James Johnson Sweeney, Lionel Trilling

PARTISAN REVIEW is published quarterly by the Foundation for Cultural Projects, Inc. at 22 East 17th Street, New York 3, N. Y. Subscriptions: $4 a year, $6.50 for two years, foreign subscriptions, including Canada, $4.50 a year, $7.50 for two years. All payments from foreign countries must be made by U.S. money orders or checks payable in U.S. currency or with $0.75 added for collection charges. Single copy: $1.00. Manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelopes.

Copyright 1955, by PARTISAN REVIEW.

Entered as second-class matter at the Post Office at New York, N. Y. under the act of March 3, 1879.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

FALL, 1955 VOLUME XXII, NUMBER 4

CONTENTS

THE JESUIT'S TALE, T. A. Hsia 441

ON SAINT-JUST, André Malraux 465

ALLEGORY: A LIGHT CONCEIT, Augusta Walker 480

OLD WOMAN'S MEDITATION, Theodore Roethke 491

GULLIVER, Patricia Coombs 494

PROBLEMS OF TRANSLATION: "ONEGIN" IN ENGLISH, Vladimir Nabokov 496

BERLIN LETTER, Ursula Brumm 513

ART CHRONICLE, Hilton Kramer 522

TOYNBEE AND SUPER-HISTORY, Walter Kaufmann 531

BOOKS

- POETRY CHRONICLE, Dudley Fitts 542
- THE ENGLISH LITERARY SITUATION, Richard Chase 548
- WAY BEYOND INNOCENCE, Elizabeth Hardwick 552
- SMALL LATIN BUT MORE GREEK?, Kathleen Nott 556
- TWO SOUTHERNERS, Theodore Hoffman 561

VARIETY

- FOR GOD AND THE SUBURBS, Isaac Rosenfeld 565

CORRESPONDENCE 570

INDEX TO VOLUME XXII 574

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Criterion Books of Distinction

ISAAC BABEL
The Collected Stories
With an introduction by Lionel Trilling
The complete fiction of a giant of modern Russian literature.
". . . a literary event of major significance."
—JAMES T. FARRELL
$5.00

DOSTOEVSKY
Winter Notes On Summer Impressions
With an introduction by Saul Bellow
Dostoevsky's passionate and headstrong impressions of Western Europe in 1862.
$2.75

G. S. FRASER
The Modern Writer And His World
A critical guide to the complicated terrain of English fiction, drama, poetry and criticism since the 1890's.
"One of the very few literary surveys I have thoroughly enjoyed." —ERIC BENTLEY
$3.95

ALBERT MEMMI
The Pillar Of Salt
This semi-autobiographical novel by a young Tunisian won the Prix Fénéon upon its publication in France.
"A beautiful book." —ALBERT CAMUS
$3.75

JEAN-PAUL SARTRE
Literary And Philosophical Essays
Sartre's best critical writing over the past twenty years, including studies of William Faulkner, John Dos Passos, Albert Camus, François Mauriac, Franz Kafka and Jean Giraudoux.
$4.00

At all bookstores

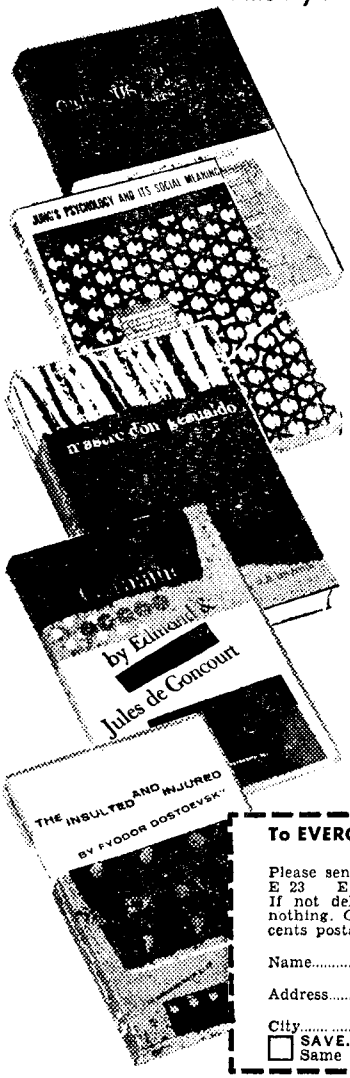
CRITERION BOOKS, INC.
100 Fifth Avenue New York 11, N. Y.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Important new titles in the revolutionary new soft-cover series

EVERGREEN BOOKS $1 and up

Not merely "reprints" but truly distinguished books,
strikingly and sturdily bound, for a permanent place in your library.
Order with the handy coupon below, and note
*the money-back guarantee of satisfaction.**



E 23. Oedipus, Myth and Complex
By PATRICK MULLAHY. Psychoanalytic theory from its early stages to the present—from Freud, Jung, and Rank, to Horney, Fromm, and Sullivan. *$1.45*

E 24. Jung's Psychology & Its Social Meaning
By IRA PROGOFF. Jung's concepts presented in easy-to-understand form, with their vast social implications interpreted for the layman. *$1.25*

E 17. Mastro-Don Gesualdo
By GIOVANNI VERGA. The great companion novel to Verga's *House by the Medlar Tree*. *$1.45*

E 21. Germinie
By EDMOND & JULES DE GONCOURT. The famous clinical study of the secret nocturnal life of a servant girl obsessed with the desire for lovers. *$1.25*

E 22. The Insulted and Injured
By FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY. The revealing novel foreshadowing the theme of sacrifice in love in *The Idiot*. *$1.45*

CONTINUING BESTSELLERS

E 6. The Marquis De Sade. *By Simone de Beauvoir.* With selections from his writings. *$1.45*

E 8. Immortality. *By Ashley Montagu.* An anthropologist's view. *$1*

E 9. Japanese Literature. *By Donald Keene.* An introduction to this exciting new world of literature now being discovered by Western readers. *$1*

E 10. Earth. The long-suppressed novel by *Emile Zola*. *$1.75*

***SEND NO MONEY.** Just mark the books you wish to examine and mail this coupon today. You risk nothing.

To EVERGREEN BOOKS, Dept. A17, 795 Broadway, N. Y. 3
(or your favorite bookseller)

Please send me the books circled below:
E 23 E 24 E 17 E 21 E 22 E 6 E 8 E 9 E 10
If not delighted, I may return books within 5 days and owe you nothing. Otherwise I will pay you the low *Evergreen* price plus few cents postage.

Name.....

Address.....

City.....Zone.....State.....

☐ SAVE. Check box and enclose remittance. We then pay postage. Same refund privilege.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BOLLINGEN SERIES
1955

XXX PAPERS FROM THE ERANOS YEARBOOKS
Vol. 2: THE MYSTERIES
Translated by Ralph Manheim and R. F. C. Hull. Thirteen distinguished scholars discuss various religious manifestations that may be characterized as "mysteries."
6″ x 9″, 450 pages, 15 plates. *$5.00*

XXXIX THE ART OF INDIAN ASIA:
Its Mythology and Transformations
By Heinrich Zimmer. Completed and edited by Joseph Campbell. Photographs by Eliot Elisofon and others.
9″ x 12″, 465 pages of text, 662 plates. Two volumes, boxed. *$22.50*

XL EGYPTIAN RELIGIOUS TEXTS AND REPRESENTATIONS
Vol. 2: THE SHRINES OF TUT-ANKH-AMON
Translated with introductions by Alexandre Piankoff. Edited by N. Rambova. First translation of the texts on the four shrines that enclose the sarcophagus.
9½″ x 12″, 160 pages, 62 plates, 3 color plates. *$17.50*

XLVII THE GREAT MOTHER
By Erich Neumann. Translated by Ralph Manheim. An analysis of a primordial image which finds expression in early man's myth, ritual, and art, and in modern man's dreams and creative work.
8″ x 10″, 380 pages, 186 plates. *$7.50*

LI THE INTERPRETATION OF NATURE AND THE PSYCHE
By C. G. Jung and W. Pauli. Translated by R. F. C. Hull. Jung on synchronicity. Pauli on the influence of archetypal ideas on Kepler's scientific themes. 5½″ x 7½″, 245 pages, 6 plates. *$3.00*

LII PANDORA'S BOX:
By Dora and Erwin Panofsky. The changing aspects of a mythical symbol in European literature and art from Roman times to the present. 8″ x 10″, 200 pages, 61 illustrations. *$4.50*

DISTRIBUTED BY PANTHEON BOOKS, INC., 333 SIXTH AVE., N. Y. 14
For detailed catalogue write to Bollingen Series, 140 E. 62 St., N. Y. 21

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

T. A. Hsia

THE JESUIT'S TALE

Father Friedrich Kolzberg, S.J., was an even bigger man than I had expected. I had made an appointment with him, and arriving at his door, after the servant, a devout-looking, middle-aged man, had let me through the nice little garden, I found him waiting for me. The sliding door was open and he was standing on the entrance platform inside the doorway, his tall black-robed figure stooping under the low ceiling of the toy-like house. Such a big man struck me, indeed, as out of place among the flimsy paper doors, the quaint little screen made out of a cross-section of the root of an old tree, the tiny carvings on the top of the wall in the forms of little birds perched on slender trees or in flight among flowers. But he was all smiles: his pale blue eyes shining out from the depths formed by thick gray eyebrows and myriads of wrinkles and his mouth, covered by bushy beard, open like a cavern—these all seemed eager to offer me the welcome.

"So you are the young man introduced by Professor Chang? Please come in."

"Father Kolzberg? I am very glad to meet you," I said in English.

"Please don't call me that foreign name. I am simply Ko Fei Li. Or if you like, call me Ko Shen-fu.* And I would appreciate it if you would speak your own language." He continued in Chinese. I was embarrassed when he seemed not to notice the hand I held out for him to grasp. Perhaps he had become unused to that form of Western civility, after, as I had learned, his fifty years in China. I could only draw my hand back and began to apply it to my shoes.

"Oh don't bother about the slippers. Just walk in. Up here."

* Meaning Father Ko.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

His voice was very thin; it sounded so incongruous with his imposing size and his large head that I felt as if I were hearing the mouse's squeak when I saw the lion open his mouth. But it was gratifying to hear Chinese being spoken so well by a foreigner, with so little studied grace and not a touch of the linguist's affectation. He spoke the Northern dialect, probably the dialect of S—— County in H—— Province where he had spent the best part of his life and where, as the newspapers said, his name as a missionary, educator, medical doctor, philanthropist, and archeologist would "stand forever in the people's memory in spite of the Communists' efforts to obliterate or besmear it." But if I could still catch a trace of foreign accent in it, it was perhaps because of my prejudices: I simply could not bring myself to believe that a man with such strongly Western looks—with his high thin nose and horse-like nostrils, sunken eyes, ashen skin, and powerful cheek-bones—could speak perfect Chinese. The only thing Chinese about him, except for his language and the name he was known by in the Chinese press, seemed to be his blue silk slippers which were gleaming with the white peonies embroidered on them; but their prettiness, daintiness, and casualness again struck me as in discord with the long black cassock covering his whole big frame. More slippers, fine straw ones, were laid in pairs near his feet. I thought it would be better to follow his example than to obey his instructions. Moreover, there was the bench, as in some Japanese-style houses, for me to sit down and take off my shoes before I should get to the main floor.

"Why must you all keep the Japanese custom when the Japanese are no more the rulers of the island?"

"But the house, I believe, was built by the Japanese. Its matted floor was not meant to be soiled by the dust of the street."

"You are right. It is perhaps a good exercise too to bend one's body so many times a day in lacing and unlacing the shoes. But it is a punishment to an old man."

I could imagine the kind of punishment he meant, seeing with what rusty clumsiness he moved as he shuffled and showed me the way in.

"Take that seat, please." He pointed to the chair farther from the door—customarily, in China, the seat for the guest—while he himself sat down, with a thud, on the one next to mine. We were separated by a little rattan table.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I wonder how the Japanese could squat on the floor all day long without cramping their legs. I am very happy to have these chairs here—all of them, together with this house, are gifts from my dear Chinese friends. The Chinese here are very nice to me, in spite of my crimes."

"Your crimes?"

"Didn't you read about that in the newspapers? Didn't you learn that I had been expelled from the Chinese mainland as an enemy of the Chinese people? Didn't you know that I had been pointed out as a narcotic trader, a counterfeiter, a usurer. . . ."

"But those are the Communist lies! No one would believe a word of it—not even the Communists themselves."

"Lies perhaps. But I signed the confession."

"The Communists could extort any kind of 'confession' from anybody. Even a venerable personage of your Church, Cardinal Mindzenty of Hungary, was loaded down with fantastic charges before he was finally disposed of. Such people are only victims of Communist tyranny and cynicism."

"You are very kind, young man. But will your people forgive me when I go back to the mainland? Shall I have the face to meet my flock again if they have found out that the priest they trusted, the beloved Ko Shen-fu, was, upon his own word, nothing but a fiend, a beast dressed in a cassock, a hypocrite now exposed? Even if they should forgive me—for I can say the Chinese people are wonderfully generous—can I forgive myself? And will God forgive me? However fictitious my other 'crimes' may be, I have committed one real crime: that is, I have lent my name to the Communist propaganda. I have become a *ch'ang,* the ghost of a man who, after having been eaten by the tiger, is leading the beast to devour his fellow human beings. By signing that document—I cannot even remember how it looked, whether I used a steel pen or a Chinese brush, I used only whatever stuff they thrust in my hand—I say, by signing that document, I have lent ammunition to the forces of evil. They are trying to uproot faith from your people and I have helped them in their unholy work. It is perhaps in consideration of the tremendous service I have rendered them that they have spared my life. But even death would not acquit a sinner."

I had not been prepared for such a display of emotion. I had

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

read about the trials and tortures he had undergone, his release after he had signed a ridiculous confession, and finally his expulsion. Neither the newspapers here nor those in Hongkong, where he had stayed a few weeks before he came to Formosa, had attached any importance to that document except that it would serve as another instance of the Soviet farce of "justice." But his vehemence in bringing down the accusation upon himself at this moment made it very hard for me to put in a word of comfort. I had come here to hear him talk about his experience on the mainland, and now he was right in the painful subject without even any trouble on my part in broaching it. A man with his learning and his experiences might talk about almost anything and it would still be interesting. But where I had expected reminiscences and anecdotes that would come in trickles and streams, I was hearing now the distant roars of a cataract which, unless checked in time, would drown me in a flood of lamentations and religious discourse and thus defeat the purpose of my interview. I would rather have the lights in his vast storehouse turned on gradually, one at a time, so that I might have an unhurried look at the wealth he had hoarded; but such a sudden blaze of passion, of religious fervor and sincerity, dazzled and blinded me. I was particularly alarmed at his aspect at the moment—his fingers and eyebrows were trembling, beads of perspiration were bursting forth on his forehead, and his eyes had sunken so deep that I could not tell whether they were still searching his own conscience or looking upward at his God for grace and forgiveness, whether they were reviewing the past or staring at a point in the distant future where, despite his ego, he was contemplating meeting again "his flock" on the Chinese mainland. His language was still the dialect of H—— Province, but now that his foreign accent was emphasized by his emotional tone, it sounded pathetic, and his voice was that of a worn-out pipe. Perhaps it was inhuman to get the old man so excited; I tried to revert to the lighter subjects with which our conversation had begun.

"No one would ever take the Communist propaganda seriously. But the Chinese people will always be grateful for the good deeds you have done for us. This nice little house, if it is a gift as you have said, is concrete evidence, even if in a small way, of our gratitude."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Oh, yes. The house is nice. But one always feels something is missing here," he said absent-mindedly. Then, wiping his brow with a white handkerchief, he added, "I am sorry. You came here on such a warm day and I had nothing to entertain you. Would you like tea or beer? I would rather recommend beer—your Taiwan beer is quite good. You know, this is a connoisseur's opinion." A gleam of a smile had come back to his eyes.

Before the servant brought in the drink, my eyes were attracted by the picture and the couplet hanging in the niche. Both were works of Chinese art, mounted on scrolls and hung vertically. The lady in the picture might easily have been mistaken for Kwan Yin, the so-called Goddess of Mercy, if she had not borne the title Holy Mother. Yes, she was holding a baby in her arms, but her delicate slanting eyebrows, her phoenix-like eyes, her tender oval face, her white hood painted in flying lines, her half-revealed raven-black curls of hair (part of a coiffure modeled, no doubt, after the headdress of a Chinese empress a thousand years ago), her blue robe with an infinite number of folds and frills, weightless and airy, mingling most gracefully with the white clouds that filled the background and hid the feet—all these represented a serenity, a feminine beauty or a divinity completely Chinese. The couplet was written by Mr. Y——, elder statesman and renowned calligrapher and poet, but now also a refugee on this island. It read:

To the Reverend Mr. Fei Li, art critic and friend of China:
Leaving the mainland, painful to see the devil usurp our home;
From this blessed island, let us actively prepare our new crusade!

Very poor verse, I should say. But it at least reflected the mood of the time when poets became slogan-writers and one could hear the rattle of the sword as angry strokes like this were hacked out by a calligrapher who, I believe, must have been as old as the "art critic and friend of China" to whom the piece of writing was dedicated.

The room as a whole looked little different from the parlors of the Chinese homes in Formosa. It was simply furnished so it looked bright and more spacious than it really was; but the mats were new: one could almost smell the fresh straw. The sliding windows in the front were wide open, and the little garden looked very green and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cool and quiet within the wide wooden frame. The morning sunshine, half of its heat filtered out by the dense foliage of the sub-tropical trees and shrubs, accentuated the beauty of the scene with its playful golden touches that would light up a yellow plantain flower or a bunch of red or purple rhododendron flowers. The garden, indeed, was so overflowing with greenness that splashes of it seemed to have dropped inside and soaked deep into the floor of the porch, and they added a new luster to the seasoned tawny juniper wood with which the floor was paved. The shade inside was further deepened by the tall trees outside the mossy walls; the alley was quiet too. Not a sound could be heard; the servant, who came in in slippers, did not make any noise when he put down the bottles of beer and glasses with ice. The old man, meanwhile, was also gazing at the view before us, his profile as hard as that of a statue hewn out of a rock, but the veins were standing out at his temple and they looked gnarled, tense, and swollen, as if a sort of blue lava rather than blood were running in them. I was afraid of an eruption.

"Well," I said, as the silence was broken by the little pop with which the servant had opened the bottle. Now the beer was bubbling into the glass, melting the ice inside. "Well, this is really a lovely place, perfect as a residence for a religious man like you. Especially after the nightmare you lived through during the past few months."

"Do you see that something is missing here?" He stared at me as he held up the foaming glass.

"We who are from the mainland will of course always miss the mainland."

"What I miss is greatness. Often I will be sitting here, looking out at the garden. What do I see? Trees, flowers, grass, sunshine and shadows—just as they are now—everything within these twenty feet. Lovely, you may say. But somehow I feel I am constricted, narrowed, shut in. I miss the grand view, the vast expanse of land, the billows and waves in the sorghum fields, the columns of wild geese flying across the rosy sunset, the broad sky meeting the broad earth in a happy communion."

"Then you would prefer to live in the country? The countryside in Formosa is lovely too."

"But it would still be different—different," he sighed.

Beer in hand, I was much impressed with the strange homesick-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ness felt by a foreigner for the Chinese mainland. But then he continued: "The windows of my house in my parish looked out on a much wider space. Life in its entirety was present before my eyes. But what do I see here? Nothing but vegetation—or sometimes an insect: a spider, a butterfly, or a drone."

"Ko Shen-fu," I said (that was the first time I called him by his Chinese title), "did you miss your own country so badly when you first came to China?"

"That was different," he smiled again. "I was young then and I was active. When one is active, one does not think so much. Moreover, I had not spent fifty years in my humble country when I came to your noble country. And thirdly, your noble country possessed the charm that would make one forget one's own country—if you do not take this remark as flattery."

"That charm must have had something to do with the view from the windows of your house in S—— County?"

"Exactly. By the way, do you believe in the transmigration of souls?"

That question was odd. "Personally I doubt it. At least it is taught by neither Confucius nor Jesus Christ. But I can't see why you ask such a question."

"For I have now seen the reason. When I signed that infamous document, I was under the spell of the Chinese belief—or is it Indian?—of the transmigration of souls. I might have held out. Do you think a man with such a physique," (he was trying to bend his arm to show me his muscles when he said that, but he soon gave it up with a smile), "—but I was a much stronger man when they took me away—and a man at my age should be afraid of torture or death? But I was haunted when I was being interrogated. I was haunted, I tell you."

I put down my glass. Here was something I had not found in the stories about him in the newspapers. Here was perhaps the real story.

"But that will be a long story to tell. Let me open another bottle of beer." His face flushed but he was apparently in better spirits now. He even put his muscle to a successful test by opening the bottle himself, and filled two glasses.

"Do you know that the young men of your country sometimes

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

all look the same to a foreigner—a foreigner who may have stayed in China for fifty years like myself? I mean they seem to have the same kind of features, the same cast of countenance, the same expressionless, mysterious look that may denote stupidity or racial wisdom or cunning or benevolence or patience or ruthlessness or any of those virtues and vices that, rightly or wrongly, have been attributed to you as a nation. I will not, of course, include you. You are a so-called intellectual, a 'mental worker,' as Mencius put it, not a 'physical worker.' You with your plastic-rimmed glasses and your cynical smiles and shrugs, are, to me, not a perfect Chinese. You belong, rather, to the Universal Republic of Intellectuals. (You see, I am flattering you again. Will you drink your beer off so as to acknowledge my compliment?) But the majority of the young men of your country are not like you. They puzzle me because they are Chinese. And they are also the masses—the mob."

"May I ask what is the difference between the masses or the mob and—a flock?"

"A very clever question. Will you be satisfied if I say that a flock is the masses converted, or the masses saved? But I am really not the man to answer your question. For after such a number from my own flock (oh, those rebellious goats!) have stood up and denounced me, I must say frankly that I know as little about my flock as about the masses. The masses are so fickle, so silent, so unresponsive, that I have never been sure of their conversion. One day you may think you have won them over, and the next day you will find they have again slipped out of your fold and that they are grazing in the happy pasture of pagan freedom. Of course, I may still win them back. But how hard my work would be if I should find them penned up in my enemy's enclosure, and that they are happy there, happy to live with the butcher and the devil! The masses can be won over, but perhaps not by me. It is not that I am old. It is because I am an intellectual like you—I am not one of them. And moreover, in my particular case, I am a foreigner. I can never become a Chinese, in spite of all my amiability and my diligent studies in your culture and civilization. Even you, for instance, are not treating me as a Chinese. You are treating me simply as a fellow member of your Republic of Intellectuals. Am I right?

"Now the Communists I had to deal with were people not like

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

you. They were the mob. (You may define the mob as the masses possessed by the devil and moved into action.) And the mob may move in a large force, such as the shouting crowds at the public trial; it may move as a dozen scurrying tight-lipped guardsmen like those who came to take me away; or it may appear as a couple of 'people's police' who were always ready, with their big powerful hands, to shake me awake if I should show the least sign of nodding or closing my drowsy eyelids during the long hours of interrogation before I was submitted to the public trial; or it may sit there in the form of a single person, the interrogator. Of course there was more than one interrogator, but they came in rotation: every two hours—or three hours or four hours, I cannot remember the exact length of time—the interrogator would retire, defeated perhaps, for I had been stubborn, but he would smile a sinister smile when he stood up and leave the chair and the prisoner to his successor, as if he were still sure of success. The new man would be of the same build, in the same drab uniform, with the same expressionless face and unruffled voice, so that you could not even get mad at the same old silly questions, the same fantastic charges which you believed you had already satisfactorily answered or denied. That man would again be foiled in his attempts to intimidate or wheedle me into accepting the charges. He would only succeed in boring me—oh I was terribly bored—but perhaps the man himself was bored too. So another man would come, but the same epitome of the mob, not loud or shrill like the mob I was to encounter later during the public trial, but a mob cool with calculated determination, a mob compressed into a Marx-Lenin-Stalin uniform, seated in the chair like a mandarin and armed with dialectic. I was so confused by the identity of the interrogators sitting before me that I soon lost my sense of discrimination. I cannot remember whether I even noticed when one of them, the fifth one perhaps, retired and another one took his place. The man, any one of the interrogators, seemed to be only a head, a voice, a series of repeated questions, a will to persecute, a simplified image of the mob, a symbol of power wielded with ruthless cunning, a mouthpiece of the new leadership which would not allow its authority to be challenged, not even by God and His priest. To such a head and voice, my answer had been a firm and complete denial. I had been indignant—I believe I had stamped my feet—but my voice had become weaker and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

weaker until I could not even gasp out an audible semblance of the monosyllabic sound that would say 'No' to the false charges which were beginning to weigh heavily upon my shoulders. I felt I might collapse at any moment to the ground. But the husky men at my elbow would help me up and revive my spirits by a slap on my face or a kick in my thigh. Such a stroke was welcome to me, for it provided stimulus to my muscles and saved them from paralysis. My trousers had become wet and dry several times but neither I myself nor the interrogator seemed to have noticed the stink. Sometimes a bowl of cold water would be thrown into my face and the drops that wet my lips seemed to be the most delicious drink I have ever tasted in my life—with all respect to your Taiwan beer. Then I would shake my head. And I continued to shake my head when I could not wag my tongue. I would not take the pen or pencil which the men by my side tried to thrust into my hand. You see I was still stubborn.

"It was, I believe, when I stood thus confusedly facing the seventh interrogator that I felt I was haunted. I began to see double —or even triple. I saw not only one ghost; I saw two ghosts." He crossed himself. I had just swallowed a lump of unmelted ice, so coldness had reached the pit of my stomach. I set down my glass and was speechless. The Madonna in Chinese dress was now radiant with a splendor of intellectual beauty which I had not noticed when I first looked at her and the white peonies on the old man's slippers were shimmering beautifully as the morning lengthened into day.

II

"The new interrogator came in with a lamp," Father Ko resumed. "He might have been one of the old interrogators, now back from his conference or other official duties. But I did not care who he was or how he looked. My head was very heavy at that time. Except that I was still shaking it in defiance, it really served no other function of a head. I had stopped thinking, and the only sense perceptions I had were the sounds which I somehow knew to be questions hurled at me but which I had ceaselessly tried to shake off. My eyes had become very dim, but why should that have troubled me? So long as I could continue to shake my head, so long as I could

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hold my fist tight, I would not have minded if I had lost my sight. You would perhaps now have a different story if God had indeed in His mercy struck me blind. For a blind man sees no distractions; with only his inner light to guide his steps, it is easier for him to pursue the right path. Darkness is no doubt suffocating and threatens with unseen danger, but illusory light can be disastrous; you will see how I was confounded by the lamp brought in by the Communist.

"As I have said, I was not bothered about the new interrogator. It was his lamp that roused me and made me see. I began to see how dark it had become. So night had fallen, the long day had passed, and happily I still had my sight unimpaired. I cannot remember if I heaved a sigh of relief. But before I had had time to congratulate myself upon the wonderful recovery of the lucidity of my mind, I was appalled by the phantasmagoric world which the flickering light of the lamp was now revealing to me. It was the first time I had ever looked round to see where I was. My attention had been too much engrossed in the progress of the battle itself to take much notice of the battleground the enemy had chosen. But the terrain was definitely against me, it would eventually spell my ruin. The court, if you can call that place a court, was held in a section of the main hall of the Jade Emperor's Temple, but the Communists, probably in a hurry to convert the temple into their local headquarters, had not removed the old idols. So now the attendants of the Jade Emperor were rising up out of the darkness in all their ugliness, the first one glowering, the next one sneering, some baring their sharp teeth, some raising a sword or a mace, and a red-visaged demon was pointing his very, very long finger at my face. Above these terrible images, I could see the huge portraits of the Communist leaders, whose chubby smiling faces looked now as benign as those of angels in Heaven. The Communist slogans, fresh and scarlet, were staring at me from the wall and at once my ears were filled with the cries, 'Exterminate the landlords,' and 'Get rid of the imperialists.' The place, which had been lost to me in my confusion and excitement even before the gathering of the dusk, looked vast and unfathomable in its dimness, floating with shadows and illuminated by a lamp that heightened rather than dispelled the mystery. I was so fascinated by the sights around me that for a moment I almost forgot about the interrogation. My eyes were opened now, but opened only to a world

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of unreality where my mission on earth, my dubious fight with the Communists all became very remote and I felt more like a child in a nightmare than a prisoner under persecution.

"Then I saw the old Taoist votive tablet hung on the pillar. Its gilt inscription struck me as if it were written in fire when the lamp came so close to it. It contained nothing more than an ancient Chinese proverb, but those few familiar characters, read under such circumstances and in such a light, became a sort of revelation to me. They afforded a reason, a theological interpretation to everything around me. In one flash I saw I was lost. At once the world was in chaos, my will broken, my strength gone, my faith shattered.

"For thus it was written: 'The Heaven covers everything like a net; its meshes may be wide, but from it there is no escape.' To a man already troubled with the feeling that he was caught in a net, this came not only as a timely reminder, but also shocked him into a new realization of his situation, that the net was being tightened by a supernatural force. And that force was identified with Heaven.

"Perhaps ever since the People's Liberation Army marched into my parish I had been prepared for such an ordeal. But distressing as the prospect had seemed at that time I had seen no cause for alarm. If I had derived comfort from the hope that, with Providential intervention, I might still regain freedom and swim in His blessings, my faith had at least not been affected by fear. I had even secretly welcomed the idea of dying at the hand of the Communists, which, as you can see, would not have been an unworthy end to my long life as a missionary and a Christian. I had seen the battle clearly defined: on the one side stood the Communist persecutors, wicked, proud, brutal, cunning, who represented Hell; opposing them were the persecuted, the innocent, the humble, the meek, the servants of Heaven, the believers who might suffer from the necessity of lying prostrate before the secular power but who would be happy and strong in their faith, dying with a hymn on their lips. The outcome of such a battle had not been hard to foresee. For I was not afraid of death, and the Devil had seemed to be a bully that could be repulsed with little difficulty by a simple heart bolstered by the stubbornness of one's character. If the battle between good and evil, the mystery of cosmic forces in perpetual fight, could be reduced to such simple terms, then even a stupid old man like me might have snapped his fingers

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

at the Tempter and said in triumph, 'Get thee behind me, Satan.' But Satan's greatest strength, as is attested by the Scriptures and the Fathers of our Church, lies in his very subtlety: you might think he is behind you when he is right before you. In my naive optimism I had evidently underestimated the Devil. He is no doubt wicked, proud, brutal and cunning; but he is more than that: he is also multiform and unpredictable; he adapts himself to every situation; he can assume an appearance of respectability or even sanctity; he can usurp the name of Heaven.

"So the shining characters on the tablet, which I now can see was nothing but a peep into Hell, a temptation that would lead me to my doom, was accepted by me at that time as a revelation of divine truth or divine will. I thought I was seeing Jehovah's fiery fingers writing down my damnation. The divine guidance I had secretly prayed for seemed to have come at last. But it only said that my case was hopeless, that the only thing for me to do was to surrender myself to the supernatural force which had caught me as if in a net. Little did I think what a profanity of thought I was then committing in accepting the analogy of Heaven, which I had always believed to be merciful, forgiving, and loving, to a mechanical device, something as subtle and heartless as a net. But seeing the hand of God was against me, I was ready to give up. Where would be the glory of death and where indeed could I escape? Who was I but an old fish who had already lived his full span of three score and ten and who was now lifted out of water, gasping and foaming, to face the mysterious fisherman whose net was said to be cast over every corner of the earth?

"So I was actually defeated by the combined strength of the Chinese pagan religion and the Communist Party. It does not mean, however, that the Communist Party, unaided, would have failed to get what they wanted from me. For I always suspect that the Devil is at work in everything the Communists have been doing. A movement that has brought about so much misery and loss of reason among mankind must have, so it seems to a Christian like me, its spiritual, as well as its political and economical reasons. Now I can say, after my own painful experience, that in dealing with the Devil, you will never be sure how you will meet him or what stratagems he will use. In my case, I had spent so much time on the study of the Chinese

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

native religion, in order to acquaint myself with the forces I was to contend with in my work as a missionary, that unwittingly, I must confess now, I was fascinated by the weird beauty of the superstitious beliefs of your country. Like a medical doctor working on germs, but who has not taken adequate precautions against their noxious influence on his own health, I had my mind poisoned long before I fell under the spell of the aphorism in gilt characters on the tablet that night. Such being my weakness and such being my state of mind after I had been roused by the lamp, you will perhaps not be surprised to hear about my reactions to the more horrible visions which were to appear to me in quick succession while for a moment I became as helpless as an old superstitious Chinese peasant.

"All the time the lamp was moving toward me, leaving the demons benign or malignant and ideograms scarlet or golden again in the shade, until the light became oppressive to me, until I felt as if I were being pushed into a white-hot furnace. The lamp came directly toward my eyes and there it stayed for a few moments that seemed to me as long as eternity. Then I heard a voice, 'You foreign monk!' and I opened my eyes. The lamp was at last put aside, one or two feet away from me, and I saw the face of the new interrogator. I was shocked. It was a shock of recognition, for it seemed that I knew the face. But that was a dead man's face and that man had been dead for about twenty-five years. I blinked. Then I saw another man's face and that man had been dead for about fifty years.

"That these two men should appear in my vision at that hour was the last pull of the net. Not only these two faces, but bits of scenes and echoes of sounds associated with them all rushed back. Confusing and fragmentary as they were, as memories revived in a heated brain must be, they somehow all fell into place and composed a whole picture, or a sequence of pictures, vivid in detail and imbued with feeling, so that it seemed at that moment as if I were reliving the past, just as it is said that people on their deathbeds see their whole past lives re-enacted before their eyes. Such a vision may of course be either an illumination or a delusion. But I was led farther away from truth, for instead of admitting, like a good humble Christian, to the limitations of human knowledge, I presumed to have found in those mental pictures the meaning of my life. The past and the present seemed so closely related that I thought I had discovered

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

for myself the law that governed them both. And that was the law of *karma,* the law of inexorable causality and inescapable retribution, which you Chinese call *pao-ying*. So the Communist inquisitor was none other than either of the two men who directly or indirectly had lost their lives because of me. If they were back now, their purpose was to settle accounts with me. Thus I became the forlorn wretch lost in a world where bloody debts must be repaid in blood, where charity or divine love was unheard of, where sins could never be expiated, where one must take up responsibility for whatever one had done.

"Now the first man in my vision was my kidnaper, whose life I had tried but failed to save; the second one was a Boxer whom I killed. The kidnaper had made a promise before he died. He said he would be back—was he back now?

"My kidnaping was actually a minor incident in a life which you might term full of vicissitudes, but at the time it happened it gave your government some trouble and created an international sensation. For immediately after my kidnaping had become known, my government sent strong protests to your government, demanding that 'prompt and effective measures' be taken to secure my release and to prevent the recurrence of similar incidents. My release was secured after the ransom was paid, but as a measure of prevention your government killed the leader of the kidnapers.

"I have been always sorry for that man's death. Not that his crime, legally speaking, did not deserve such a punishment, but he was also a nice fellow who might have been converted into a good citizen and Christian. I enjoyed my stay with him as his 'guest' in his hideout among the hills where I had been taken after he had stopped me, at the point of his gun, while traveling a hundred *li* from my church. I should say I received much better treatment from the bandits than from the Communists. For those ruffians were genuine materialists: they cared little about my 'ideology'; their interest was simply how much I was worth in terms of silver and gold. Instead of treating me as an enemy, they called me *ts'ai-shen-yeh* (money god) or *yang-ts'ai-shen* (foreign money god). And that man had said that he would like to place me in a shrine and lay before me all the offerings they could afford that were due to a god if I only could bring them the sum of money they had asked. Though

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he sometimes would threaten to 'tear me to pieces' if the ransom should fail to come within a certain period of time, I could see he meant it only as a joke. For he believed all 'foreign devils' in China were mighty wealthy people and that my 'folks at home' would certainly be glad to part with 'a tiny fraction of their fortune' to see me set free.

"But my host, in his happy dreams, had never suspected that the money would be paid by his own government and that those gentlemen in Peking (the incident happened before your Generalissimo launched his Northern Expedition) as well as the local military and police officers had made up their mind to have him caught and executed as due punishment for a crime that had caused everybody concerned so much embarrassment. In those years, you know, when the 'face' of a government was at stake, justice naturally became a matter of secondary importance. So, soon after my release, the strongly reinforced local garrison, having somehow or other located the 'den' of the bandits, started a campaign and captured every one of the dozen people responsible for my kidnaping. This, of course, I did not know until some time later.

"One day I was summoned before the colonel of the garrison. He said he had a man there whom he wanted me to identify. When that man was hustled in, in chains and swollen with bruises, I cried out, 'Isn't that Big Brother Wang?'—for that was how my kidnaper was called by his followers. 'So that is our man,' said the colonel, rather gleefully. 'Do you want to say some prayers for him before he dies?'

" 'Do you mean to kill him? Oh, no! Big Brother Wang is a good man, he is only foolish. I would be glad to pay the bail, take him to my church and answer for his subsequent conduct.'

" 'I very much appreciate your benevolence, Shen-fu,' said the colonel. 'But as a soldier, I knew nothing but to obey my orders. But I don't think that man stands any chance of getting his pardon, though his followers may.'

"But the prisoner interrupted our conversation. 'No more of your hypocrisy, you foreign monk!' (So I was no more his *ts'ai-shen*.) 'I let you sleep in my own bed and I fed you with big pieces of meat and the best wine I had fermented for myself. But I would rather have fed a dog than an informer like you. I let you go and you told

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

everything to the soldiers. I trusted you like a friend and you have sold me. You are here to plead for my life, you double-dealing foreign devil! But I'll never trust you again. Let them chop my head off and my shoulders will only be relieved of a big burden. But I tell you I'll be back again as a man within twenty years. Save your breath now and spend it on me then, if you have twenty more years to live!'

"The officer promised, before I left, to dispatch in my name a petition to the governor. The next morning, however, the first thing I saw from my window was a bloody human head placed in a wooden cage nailed to the telegraph pole. Under it was a large placard, filled with characters in a lustrous black, heavily marked with lines and dots and little circles in red to punctuate as well as to emphasize the key passages, and bearing in the end the full weight of authority in the forms of three big square or rectangular seals in vermilion. Even from that distance, I could distinguish words and phrases like 'Wang,' 'kidnaper,' 'friendly nations,' 'entitled to protection,' 'to kill one man as an example to one hundred,' etc.

"So they had hoisted the head and the placard in front of my church is if to tell me that my wrong had been avenged and that my government should be satisfied now. But the man had died unrepentant and under the erroneous impression that I had been the informer. He should have known that with or without anybody to inform against him he could never have got away with his money since there was really a sort of net closing in on him and his gang of evildoers. Of course I have regretted that the man should have carried down to his grave the grudges he had thus borne me. But what I have felt most sorry for is that I could not save him. I had talked to him about repentance; I had tried to persuade him to let me go and not to take one cent of the ransom; I had offered him help if he would only try to be good. But the things he liked to hear from me were what food we ate, how we built such a tall building as our church, how many kinds of guns we generally used; in a word, he was interested in the life that the 'foreign devils' led, but the material side of life only. Perhaps, with the ransom in view he had had some plans of buying some foreign guns, building a big foreign house, and living like a foreign devil himself.

"But he had made a boastful promise that he would be back

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

twenty years later. And here I could see he was seated, by the lamp, just as in those evenings when, after supper, over a game of cards, I would preach to him about the evils of material desire and the choice between God and Mammon. But he would stop my mouth with what he called his 'discoveries about my private life'—a long list of monstrous vices that seemed to have a very strong appeal to his lurid imagination, debaucheries, atrocities, and practices of witchcraft commonly attributed to the robber-monks in Chinese dime novels, of which he was an insatiable reader. He said that he had found secret chambers in my church where beautiful naked women were kept; that I preserved my youth and virility by feeding on the fetuses taken from disemboweled women; that I held the souls of my parishioners in bondage by nailing their effigies on little chips of wood; that I sent little paper men in the night to rob the rich men one thousand *li* away and to remove their hoarded gold to my own cellar. But he would not expose me, fiend though I was, he would continue with a laugh—oh, no, since I was going to share the gold with him. What fantastic stories! How ridiculous!

"But those charges seemed again to be buzzing irritatingly around my ears, accompanied by the distant echoes of that man's obscene laughter. Twenty-five years had passed since he died and he was back now. He had kept his promise, and the man seated before me, I could recognize, was his reincarnation. So thanks to my long life, I had the rare opportunity of meeting the same person in his two existences. The inquisitor—the kidnaper—which was he? They looked almost identical, but was I sure? For vague, elusive and shadowy, the man's features looked rather like reflections in a cesspool. Or as if they had belonged to a head hanging in the air, a head hoisted high against a gray morning sky. Then at once I saw blood all over that head and it was boxed in a cage. I blinked, and the cage was gone. The horrible face remained, but I knew it was somebody else's—the Boxer's. Just as I was sure the inquisitor was a reincarnation, I could see, too, that the kidnaper had been only the Boxer reincarnated. So three existences in one single life, fifty years of my personal history and your national history, were presented to my eyes all in one moment. But now I had come to the end of the cycle when hatred was to be appeased at last and debts long outstanding were to be repaid. The mystery of life was grasped in one wink of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the eye and everything was solved. I was shocked but my mind was at peace—the kind of peace which is said to come only to those who have discovered the truth.

"I knew almost nothing about the Boxer as an individual; I had known him only as a member of the mob. For the Communists are not the only mob I have encountered. Fifty years before my arrest—as you well know, the year was 1900—our church in China was caught in another outburst of mass hatred known as the Boxer rebellion. The movement, suppressed at first by the local authorities but quickly expanded and gone rampant under the patronage of the Empress Dowager, was aimed at the destruction of us foreigners. The Boxers would seek and kill not only all the foreigners in China, but also the Chinese who had anything to do with us, the converts to the 'foreign religion' as well as traders dealing in foreign goods. When, twenty-five years later, the kidnapper showed such admiration for the foreign architecture and foreign-made guns, he had already made a great advance over the Boxers. For the Boxers would just burn the foreign building and look with contempt upon firearms, though gunpowder, I believe, was actually a Chinese contribution to the civilized world. They would match our guns and rifles with their swords and spears, or even with their muscles, for it was their belief that the human body, fortified by faith, could withstand any harm. So they would just run into the gun fire and meet their death. And as they fell, so also died their movement.

"But that movement had a special significance for me. I had just then been assigned to our mission in China as a novice and I found myself in a land where our work was not welcome. The air was already tense with hostility and sporadic incidents of violence occurred almost daily. When telegraph poles were cut down and railroads destroyed by the mob, it seemed that nothing smacking of Western civilization would be allowed to remain in the great Empire of China. I had luckily just slipped in, when China had made up her mind to close her door with a big bang. But I had to stay, and my work had to progress. So you can imagine the young novice with an adventurous bent of mind, fresh in your country, looking out in those exciting days, gun in hand, from the long narrow window in the thick stone wall to watch the movements of the enemy. He was thrilled by the prospect of literally defending his church as a soldier

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

would defend his fortress. He knew that upon his vigilance and his Mauser would hang the lives of so many refugees who, believers and non-believers alike, peaceful citizens of many villages, had moved into the church for protection. The church was strongly built, with space enough to house all of them, and provisions had been made against a siege. He was stationed in the priest's study, the room in which he was to spend many hours reading and meditating during the later years when he himself became the priest. But then he was only there to stand ready for the enemy. But for many days he saw not an enemy, but only the vast green fields of sorghum spread out under the blue summer sky and huge masses of white cloud. Sometimes a fire and wreaths of dark smoke would rise on the horizon, and then he knew that another of his parishioners' houses was burning. But there was no sign of a battle. The sorghum covered miles and miles of land like a forest, monotonously green, mysteriously quiet, but its tall stalks and dense long leaves could well hide a whole regiment. Any day, any moment, the enemy might appear in force; then the peaceful sorghum fields would be bristling with arms and the defender might be caught unprepared. So for many vigilant hours, the youthful defender was keeping his watch over the sorghum fields and they became in his imagination a symbol of the people among whom he had just come to stay to prepare his work as their pastor: in appearance vast, simple, and peaceful, yet so dense as to be almost impenetrable, so unstable that they would rise and fall in big waves at the touch of a little breath of wind, and hostile and dangerous in the sense that the enemy was just lurking anywhere and you could never tell when he would jump at your throat.

"This, regrettably, was my first impression of your noble country, and as first impressions often do, it hardened into a prejudice, and I have ever afterwards been biased as regards your national character. I was always wondering, even after the Boxers were beaten back, with the help of firearms and at the cost of many human lives, whether hostility had really been removed from your hearts. For years our work went on peacefully, almost prosperously, so that sometimes I would say to myself that peace and good will had at last been established in your country. But such a complacent mood did not last long. I began painfully to witness the growth of a new enemy: Communism. Its threat became more and more real until

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

it took over our church and I was kicked out of your door. That my missionary work should have begun with the Boxer Rebellion and ended at the hand of the Communists—was that a mere coincidence? That is why I was so often in spite of myself fascinated by the teachings of your ancient sages. Could what they said—that the world evolved only in a circle, that progress was an illusion, that everything would return to where it started—be all nonsense? But I believe I have found an answer to such a heresy. Since my life has been spared this time, perhaps there is still something left for me to accomplish. Can't I say now that I have been saved so that some day I can be sent back to your mainland and prove to the world that no frustrations and defeats will ever dishearten the faithful?

"Though I would often associate the Communists with the Boxers in my thoughts, the latter were a much less formidable enemy. They were the mob in its crudest form, with no discipline, no organization, no ideology, no strategy to speak of. They were only the inept, ignorant, primitive sort of fanatics. Fired with no less intense a hatred, they, however, had none of the Communists' subtlety and finesse, restraint and precision. As their name implies, their only strength was in their bare fist, while the Communists can either strike with their fist mailed, or stroke with a velvet paw. If they had anticipated some of the Communists' technique; if, for instance, they had worshiped Marx and Engels, instead of such story-book figures, discredited even then by your intellectuals, as the Old Dame of Mount Li and Sun Wu Kung the Monkey King; if they had evolved an economic theory and a cadre system; if they had been far-sighted enough and humble enough to learn from Western technology and Western science; if things had happened that way, those early fanatics might have won the day. They might have come to stay and our church would have been wiped out in China even fifty years ago. At least after what has lately happened on the Chinese mainland, I really doubt whether the Communists are not spiritual heirs to the Boxers. But being what they were, the Boxers alienated everybody's sympathy before they had achieved anything. They won a number of hearts among your rabble and bigots, but I wonder whether they ever won a single pitched battle. When at last they appeared from the sorghum fields, they were not nearly so dangerous as I had feared. They wrapped their heads in red bands and those gave them away

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

immediately. They were about one hundred in number (for I could easily count the number of red knobs moving in the green fields), and we had about a dozen Mausers, pistols, and shotguns. But we stopped their advance by killing almost as many of them as emerged from the fields and came into the open within the range of our fire-arms. Against our well-planned defense, their foolhardy courage and their shining blades were of no avail. They fell down like so many red-headed insects before the spray of some poisonous powder.

"The smoke from our guns vanished into the blue sky; the dust raised by the advancing enemy settled back to the earth and the turmoil subsided. The Boxers, those that had survived, disappeared, while the sorghum fields looked as vast and calm as ever. On the yellow ground, along the fringes of the field, were scattered the dead and the wounded, lying in grotesque postures, their swords and spears gleaming. But groans could be heard. Some of them were kicking their legs.

"But of a sudden I heard a shout, while a sword flashed toward my eyes. It was too late to raise my gun. So I simply dodged the thrust, and grasped with one hand the arm that held the sword. I dragged the man toward me. For a moment we stood face to face, one inside, the other outside the window. It was a contest of strength, but he was giving ground until my big right hand reached his throat and I began to throttle him. The sword had dropped in the room at last and both of my hands were now applied to his neck. I saw how the man bulged his eyes and clenched his teeth. Then there was a crack and the man's neck was broken.

"That was the man I killed. Of all the Boxers, he was the cleverest. He knew how to take cover, to sneak, to attack by surprise. There were several trees and bushes that stood between the sorghum field and our church where he could have hidden himself. Then he had avoided notice by crawling along the base of the wall. And, what a wise man indeed, he did not wear the betraying red band! His death was different from that of his comrades too. He was killed not by a gun, but overpowered by sheer physical strength. I felt a moment of elation, for I had defeated the man at his own game. My muscles were stronger than his: I had proved to be a more powerful gladiator, or, for that matter, a better Boxer.

"That day I was not allowed to leave my post, so I could only

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bury the man the next day. His flesh, supposedly indestructible, was already stinking badly. I was somehow afraid to look at his face again but could not avoid it. I dragged him to the graveyard of our church, and threw him into the hole I had dug for him. I buried him together with all the ants that were devouring his body. The ants, I believe, must have found their way out again, or at least they must have been enjoying their new underground habitation so richly provided. But not the flies. For the man's body was strangely covered with sores, and the flies had been relishing them. I had never known that flies could be as tenacious as leeches, so when I shoveled back the earth into the hole, the flies, swarms of them, were buried alive. Nice company for the dead, I thought with a grim smile.

"Hung around the man's neck was a little red bag, inside which I found a piece of yellow paper. I had some friend of mine read the characters on it for me, for I had not yet started my lessons in Chinese. I found the inscription very interesting—but who could suspect that it contained a curse? I can recite it to you now and you will see why the votive tablet in the Jade Emperor's Temple fifty years later should have produced such a terrible effect on me:

Golden Light Holy Mother's Most Miraculous Body-Protection Amulet:
The Net of Heaven is cast over everything;
Both Good and Evil will get their desserts:
He that kills me shall perish;
But I shall rise from the dead.

Perhaps it was a mistake not to bury the amulet together with the body it was supposed to protect. Instead I kept it, as well as the sword the Boxer had dropped into my room, and those trophies became the first two items of my once-famous collection of Orientalia, which, of course, like everything else that might be said to be mine, has been taken over by the Communists.

"We buried all the dead; we held a Mass for the repose of their souls; we even erected crosses on their tombs. But I had never expected the Boxer, long buried, would reappear in the Communist court of interrogation. Now here he was, the same hideous person whom I once had held in my grip. But instead of my pulling him in, I felt he was pulling me out of the window. And my strength

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was failing. I was ready to let go my hold, ready to surrender everything—my fortress, my God, all the innocent refugees seeking shelter under my roof, my life, my faith, my calling, my vow—to the brutal force that had suddenly appeared in my window and that had proved to be more than I could resist. But when I was loosening my hand, I saw that the face before me was a dead man's face. It was not actually any man's face, but a mask, one of those masks used in Chinese drama. The mask was an image of Hate, of a hatred so deep, so impersonal, so abstract, that it would never lose its intensity in the course of time, nor would it ever be mollified by anything on the earth or beyond it.

"So I saw everything now. But I did not know when I had regained my voice. I said to the man or the face before me, 'Give me the paper. I will sign.' "

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

André Malraux

ON SAINT-JUST

> "I don't have much use for that wild man. He wants France to be a Spartan republic, but what France needs is to be a land of plenty."
>
> —*Remark attributed to Danton*

Saint-Just the historical figure is indistinguishable from Saint-Just the legend: this has been clear ever since the literature about him began to be written. After pamphlets and panegyrics gave way to so-called "objective studies," which transformed him into a mere politician, Saint-Just became unintelligible. This book[1] seeks, through historical methods—and using the greatest wealth of documentation so far brought together—not to disprove the legend, but to discover the key to it. Albert Ollivier does not equate the revolutionary spirit simply with an extreme exaltation; and we must not read his biography as we would one of Robespierre. Even though he lays siege to his subject from all sides, as he would have Robespierre, he knows that Saint-Just has certain subterranean aspects which defy such encirclement.

"All the Robespierres, the Dantons, the Saint-Justs, now, it seems to me, lie deflated on the strand," wrote Barrès around 1920: and yet the French revolution was only the first of five which the world had in store for it.

Our French revolution is the legendary moment of our history; greater than that of Louis XIV, and less blurred than that of Saint Louis. It inspired the young men of France as the Nibelungenlied inspired those of Germany, as Plutarch had stirred the youth of other times. It marked a transformation of the world; it was a period of unlimited possibilities, when sons of innkeepers became kings, and sons of petty noblemen became emperors—when ancestry counted

1 *Saint-Just et la Force des Choses,* by Albert Ollivier, to which this essay, which appeared originally in the *Nouvelle Nouvelle Revue Française,* is the preface.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

for nothing, and parentage for little. It was a period whose heroes did not reach old age. When Saint-Just saw Hoche for the last time, they were both twenty-six. Danton died at thirty-five, Robespierre at thirty-six. Those few years were presided over by the image of youth, cut off in its prime, and triumphant over the old Heraclitean stream. . . .

That was not a time of families; men alone shaped the course of events; and, in the heyday of Saint-Just's power, women had no influence. The Plutarchean epoch extends from the execution of Madame du Barry, of Marie Antoinette, and of Madame Roland, to the release of Madame Tallien. The nation alone was queen, to be served by eloquence and terror.

The legendary mantle of terror envelops many a great figure, and chiefly that of Robespierre. But the aura of Saint-Just emanates from his own being, and it is this aura I shall try to capture.

Today, the Dantonist historians have lost much of their authority. It may be that Danton was guillotined by fanatics; if so, Robespierre was no doubt guillotined by scoundrels. One may smile at the latter's nickname of "Incorruptible," but the fact is that neither Tallien, nor Barras, nor Fouché ever laid claim to the title. The Dantonists seem to have gotten all the glory of the Revolution, and the Robespierrists, the blood. History is Manichean when it animates dreams and legitimates passions. And Michelet, the father of this Manicheanism, could neither arrive at a clear idea of Robespierre nor make us understand the sources of his power; on the other hand, Michelet's fraternal and intuitive penetration imposes on us an image of Saint-Just which is at once forbidding and grandiose, a myth in itself. No Robespierrist has his statue in France, but the name of Saint-Just is inscribed in a secret Pantheon. When an adolescent wields the powers of destiny, he seems not to have conquered them, but to have received them from some divinity. However, Saint-Just's "young girl's complexion," his very low forehead and eyebrows that met, were hardly enough to justify the designation of Archangel of the Terror. It was myth that gave to Danton the face of Mirabeau, and to Mirabeau that of Beethoven; but the portrait in the Carnavalet Museum shows us a baby-faced Danton. The beauty of Saint-Just did not give birth to legend, his beauty was born of legend; for his head to become that of the Archangel of the guillotine, it had to be exhibited by the executioner.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But that executioner cut short a historical destiny. A number of contemporaries saw in Saint-Just the coming rival of Robespierre. What would history have been like if the blade had not fallen on Robespierre, releasing Hoche, and opening the way to Bonaparte? We can only speculate, in the silence kept by Saint-Just from the eighth of Thermidor until his execution. Does this silence hide a break with Robespierre, as Michelet conjectures ("This young Draco was the one betrayed by all. . . ."), and as all the facts brought together and ordered by Albert Ollivier indicate so strongly? This break would account for the somnambulistic scorn of Saint-Just, the note of "Too late" which seems to be tolling in him after the moment at which his last speech was interrupted. This famous orator, interrupted by a point of order while occupying the rostrum, does not seem to have *attempted* to take the floor again, even during the formal accusation of Robespierre, even during his own accusation; this leader who alone among the members of the Convention under indictment was capable of organizing military resistance, spent the hours of his temporary freedom watching over the corpse of Le bas. . . . Was the rescue action of the Commune a disaster to the accused? Would the revolutionary tribunal have acquitted them? We hear again the anguished accents of Robespierre, when somebody asked him to sign the appeal to the people: "In the name of what?" Saint-Just was less of a legalist. No surprise, no succession of events or random happenings can entirely account for the suicidal behavior of his last night, nor explain his silence, like the toga of Caesar raised before his murderers. He seems to have accepted his rescue with the same bitter indifference he showed at his execution.

Then there is the question of friendship. Let us not underestimate its power. It is because they were friends that Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, Bouvard and Pécuchet, are more than mere grotesques. Robespierre's only known intimates were the Duplays; in the view of history, his friends were those who died with him, and for him, like the faithful for an idol with closed eyes; he did not die for them. Saint-Just was one of the faithful. And doubtless history is not mistaken about him, since he wore the mask of friendship even under the guillotine.

But neither the image of the mascot of the Terror nor of the exemplary friend are enough to distinguish Saint-Just the Great Accuser from Robespierre.In France's memory, in which the Revolution

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

is inseparable from the war, Saint-Just continued the work of Danton whom he killed; "We are satisfied with you, Citizen Representative; your courage has not wavered under fire. We have had our eyes on you: you are a good soldier." Which required a certain firmness, for the tricolor garb of the Citizen Representative made a good target. But "he charged like a young Hussar." We know that he was not satisfied just to charge: he braved defeats, and he disdained easy victories, while the energy of Robespierre was clandestine or parliamentary. And French legend cherishes fighters rather than the professional military; it ignores the generals who crushed the Vendée rebellion and exalts the civilians who hid the accused Jourdan, entrusted the army to him, contributed powerfully to its reorganization, and who when they wrote: "We anticipate victory" added: "We are sending enemy flags." Some Frenchmen remember Saint-Just, no doubt, because all Frenchmen remember the fighters of the Year II. . . .

All this is part of his legend, but still does not give us a picture of him, even if we add to it his brilliant gifts. Saint-Just was not another Marceau, although the glamour of his bravery, talent, and early death made him like that general. He was not more eloquent than Vergniaud, nor more energetic than Danton; he was not more ruthless than Marat: he had all those qualities with a difference.

In his speeches and his decrees, the historians perceive less the echo of Robespierre, than that of Bonaparte. Great figures enter history when they are given power over men: before leading the army of Italy to victory, Bonaparte first had to be put in command of it. For this, an intrigue would have sufficed; but would it have sufficed to transform tramps into legionnaires, to put back into the ranks older and more experienced generals? *Before* the first battle, Bonaparte was already a man possessed; possessed by the will to fashion a disorderly mass into an efficient instrument of war; a will to which he subordinated everything, as implacably as Saint-Just. His orders were executed because they seemed dictated by a superior power: Victory; just as the orders of Saint-Just seemed dictated by the Republic. And Saint-Just at Strasbourg, before the first battle, did exactly as Bonaparte in Italy. He restored faith; and to do that, order—beginning with the commissariat. . . . Bonaparte and Saint-Just differ in their aims, but what they have in common is the impersonal magic

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

spell around them from which they drew their authority.

Let us not be taken in by their ventures into literature: interest in these notes is great; instruction from them, zero. The writings of Bonaparte, had he died at thirty, would suggest a personality with scarcely any resemblance to Napoleon. These men, capable of acting in their own pure style, showed no originality in their literary reveries, naively emulating Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Carnot did likewise in his poems; and Laclos, too, in *L' Education des Filles.* (But Laclos wrote *Les Liaisons Dangereuses,* as Saint-Just wrote his speeches. . . .) While the "force of circumstances" plays a crucial role in historical destinies, every man of history is guided, from his very first action, by a sense of reality, of these very "circumstances"—the notebooks in which we believe we shall find Saint-Just's secrets, actually contain only trivialities. His confidences and his reveries are of little importance: his real secret is that which makes his actions possible. He jotted down some inane remarks about the army; but when he had to submit a plan for its reorganization, he wrote a speech which Napoleon admired. But if his energy and his realism are comparable to Bonaparte's, still they served the Republic, not his own ambition. A republic which was not "the government": an ideal which he helped create, strove for, achieved, and strove for still, as Bonaparte strove for glory. He is identified with this effort even more than Napoleon with his victories, than Napoleon with the Empire. It remains to discover what the Republic meant for Saint-Just.

His Italian campaign is, clearly, his speech demanding the death of the King. Michelet has described its impact: "When, dropping Louis XVI and passing to the subject of the Gironde, he turned his whole body toward the Right and directed at the Girondists, along with his words, his whole person, his hard and murderous glance, there was no one there who did not feel the cold of steel." The force of his speech did not come from the eloquence of the period, but from formulas which were meant to be Roman—and were. Formulas inseparable from their grip on the event. His words lose their profound resonance if one sees in them only the accusation of Louis XVI. "That man must reign or die!" was not addressed to the King: it was the indictment of the Convention by its own conscience. The assembly, of which the majority regretted condemning for the sake of justice,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was enjoined by Saint-Just to kill for the sake of duty.

It seems, today, that the death of the King had been decided on by several individuals, Danton in particular, in order "to fling the corpse of Louis XVI between France and the enemy"; but this resolve was never avowed. Hence a "war criminal" trial was held, in which the tribunal felt itself to be both the judge and a principal, and was all the more profoundly uneasy insofar as it claimed to judge in the name of law and of justice. By what law, if not one it itself chose? As to justice, eight centuries of royalty sanctified in the cathedrals were not so easily forgotten; it was a mockery to "judge Louis as a citizen." "That man," said Saint-Just, "will argue that everything he did was done by him to defend the sacred trust he had been given." Even the firing on the people: was he the first to do that? There remained the fact of his flight toward the army of the enemy. We are amazed that Saint-Just speaks of it incidentally. At least for him, *sacred trust* had a meaning. He alone, in condemning this man, wanted to do away by violence with the crown of Saint Louis and the purple of Richelieu, to kill the very soul of the monarchy: he did not demand this weak head because it was guilty, but because it was usurping. On the corpse that was going to symbolize all the kings of France, the young sacrificer expected to found the Republic of Divine Right.

This speech, which would have been inconceivable from Bonaparte, Saint-Just repeated against Danton, and he would have repeated again against Hoche. Ambition? That was quickly satisfied. Let us not compare the ambitious Saint-Just to the modest and pious Fouché, the most expert of his murderers. His contemporaries spoke less of his ambition than of his fanaticism. One understood by this later on, exaltation and implacability. Exalted? Silent rather, except when called upon to speak to soldiers. It is indeed a fanatic that we have here, since this is a man with a faith.

His vocabulary misleads us, and perhaps it misled him too. At times the word "principles" had for him the meaning current in the eighteenth century, and at times it had a quasi-theological meaning. To be sure, he was not a Christian. But he did not fight just to defend a regime which he thought good and against the return of a regime which he thought bad; the revolution was his vocation. The

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

revolution had created the world in which he lived, and which the Republic alone had the right to judge. He aspired to be the sword-bearer of this judgment against all, and by all possible means, from the bayonet charge at Fleurus to police action. The Republic would be saved by the militant communion of the faithful, and it would change the condition of men; its enemies were not infidels, but scoundrels. A singular mythology? No more so than that of the Koran, which many remarkable men of action have served; no more so than certain varieties of Marxism. Saint-Just was twenty-one at the taking of the Bastille, and died just after Fleurus. His brief life as a man developed wholly within a victorious Apocalypse. But "it is for you to decide whether the French people are to be tradesmen or conquerors . . ." is not exactly political: it is Islam.

He dreamed of idyllic plowmen under the benign rule of venerable old men. As in the stories. Some day his old men will be studied along with the Augustan bucolics and the sheep of Bonaparte. Did he think that the end of privilege, followed by the end of conspiracies, would be enough to assure the general prosperity? Whenever his voice takes on its characteristic tone, he is no longer speaking of the organization of farm production, but of *delivering* the people: "It is less a matter of making the people happy than of preventing them from being unhappy." That is, to deliver the people from their hereditary oppressors, as well as from the conspirators who were hoarding grain and devaluing the currency, and especially from the foreign invader; but also from the rich citizens of Strasbourg who let the soldiers of the army of the Rhine go without shoes—and from the prosecutor, Schneider, whom he had exposed and showed to the people bound to the guillotine. The Robespierrists were not defenders of the bourgeoisie. They were defenders of the Republic, that is to say of the state. True, they crushed the Parisian proletariat; but the tenth of Thermidor made money king. The Board of the Bank of France financed Brumaire to the strains of the music of the Directory's balls; no Spartan nobility was to succeed the last French aristocrat. Nevertheless, nothing was further from Saint-Just's mind than the proletariat: "A trade ill befits the true citizen: a man's hand is meant only to till the soil and to bear arms."

Rousseau declared that man was meant to till the soil, but not to bear arms. And Saint-Just becomes strikingly clear to us when

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

we understand that his ideal society does not derive from the *Social Contract* nor from the Enlightenment—it is not even rooted in his own century.

He wanted boys to leave the paternal home at the age of five, and belong to the Republic until they were twenty-five (the age of Saint-Just when he wrote). They were to spend the twenty years in uniform, sometimes as tillers of the soil and sometimes as soldiers; girls were to be brought up by their mothers. Let us not take the text in question lightly. It does not present us with one of those utopian constructions, so common at the time, in which lawyers weary of their codes gave way to Greuze-like fantasies; and it is preposterous only if one assumes that Saint-Just's goal was happiness. Once we realize that he was aiming at *something else,* this text of his will take us to the very center of his conception—by the way, the word "conception" does not really apply here. Saint-Just only half believed in laws and in the Senate, so long as the laws were not based on the prevailing *mores,* and so long as the Senate was not founded on virtue. The *mores* were to assure the maintenance of virtue, and what he meant by virtue was his own: the vocation of the Republic. He wanted to create institutions which would mold men, and men who would will laws worthy of them. When we cease to view such institutions as means toward human happiness, let alone as embodiments of reason—seeing them as something akin to the metric system or the reforms of the Civil Code—their true nature is disclosed: they are the rule of an immense monastery in which the revolutionary cockade has replaced the cross. For Saint-Just the task of the nation was to liberate all the oppressed just as the early monastic orders were founded to liberate souls. The Spartan way of life he advocates is that of the religious orders. His uniform is of sackcloth. Saint-Just has been regarded as a rationalist because he was a realist; Saint Bernard, Saint Dominic, Saint Ignatius—even Mohammed—were not dreamers.

"All definitions must be based on conscience: the intellect is a sophist who leads all the virtues to the scaffold." He says that institutions are the means of forming this conscience, and whatever he may say of it, this conscience is more than a sense of justice. He thought he had found such institutions in Sparta; he could have found them in the Church. If he feels himself identified with the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

army and wants to be so, this is not only because the army is indispensable, but also because he sees in it a rough parallel to Spartan society in which classes are of no importance (in the religious orders there are no class conflicts . . .). It is difficult for us to imagine what the revolutionary army was like after Jemmapes, after the recapture of Landau, the day after Fleurus. In this extraordinary, though often despoiled, army, the Republic nevertheless found its first incarnation, which had nothing to do with the politicians and their frauds. When Saint-Just wrote in a rage to the Committee: "I have seen soldiers starving to death holding on to their muskets," he was in his element. And he knew what he was talking about. On his arrival at Strasbourg the soldiers were selling their shoes. (He gave them other shoes, and decreed that whoever bought military goods from them was to be condemned to death.) In his constitution, "an army which elects its own commander is held to be rebellious." On the other hand he wants the liberated villages of Alsace to be renamed for the soldiers who distinguished themselves in the fighting, and wants every wounded man, "to wear a gold star on his clothing over the spot where he received wounds; if he was mutilated or suffered a face wound, he will wear the star over his heart." His Republic is a peasantry whose leadership is supplied by an army—a kind of Jacobin Club in the service of the state—and an order of revolutionary Templars (an idea perhaps suggested by his contact with Freemasonry in his adolescence). For this officer's son, brought up by priests, "the destiny of a people is shaped by those who strive for glory and those who strive for riches." But he wanted those who strive for riches to be ruled by those who strive for glory. Our century has seen that such a goal is not utopian, provided that we identify the latter with those who strive for power. Saint-Just's theories anticipate neither communism nor fascism; he wants to follow in the steps of Lycurgus, and regards industry as superfluous, except insofar as it can create arms. But he does anticipate *the* communists and *the* fascists, the single and all-powerful party. Passionately totalitarian, he proclaimed that "It is in the nature of things that our economic affairs will become more and more muddled, until such time as the established republic encompasses all relations, all interests, all laws, all duties, and gives a common direction to all parts of the state." He does promise, in Thermidor, a coming period of clemency. But

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

even if he had abolished the guillotine, he would, I think, have developed secret denunciations still further. In his system, anyone who refrained from denouncing others was necessarily their accomplice, and the Republic could rest only on an austere élite, with something like the GPU as one of its elements.

What he understood by conscience now becomes intelligible. It is not the moral conscience; it is, strictly speaking, a faith. The Republic for him is the highest value. Doubtless he was as susceptible as his contemporaries to the appeal of the gloomy sentimentalized Coliseum which provided the revolution with its décor. But for almost everyone—including Napoleon—classical antiquity was a stylized pattern which they followed. It was a literary interpretation of it which they acted out—Saint-Just also, occasionally. But he alone strikes the true note of somber magic which was the original source of this interpretation. He alone was nourished by the She-Wolf who endowed the great Roman figures with demonic powers. "Caesar was immolated in full view of the Senate; twenty-three strokes of the dagger were the only formality, and the only law his executioners obeyed was the liberty of Rome." Saint-Just seems to be the only one who realized that it was through the language of blood and not through that of the theater that the French Revolution harked back to the Lacedaemonian Rome which haunted them all; and he replied to Danton as the Grand Inquisitor of Dostoevsky would reply to Chateaubriand the author of *Genie du Christianisme*. He holds us spellbound, but he himself is under a spell. In this period, still mistaking the statue for the real Brutus (and actually giving Brutus the attributes of Caesar), Saint-Just bent all his energies on discovering within the confusion of events the fixed star which he called the Republic. Napoleon was to call this star Napoleon; Lenin, the proletariat; Gandhi, India; General de Gaulle, France. The world of appearances becomes history by gravitating around such a star.

If Saint-Just seemed to be a better actor than the others, it was because he was not acting at all. As soon as he arrived at Strasbourg he set up the Revolutionary Committee; "Dishonest officials will be shot." Disturbed, the Jacobins dispatched a messenger. Reply: "We are here not to fraternize with the authorities but to judge them." In Landau, besieged by the Austrians, he replied to the plenipotentiary who proposed honorable capitulation for the garrison: "The

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

French Republic receives nothing from its enemies and sends them nothing but lead." After the relief of Landau, when Jourdan surrounded Charleroix, Saint-Just did not open the letter sent him by the besieged governor: "It is not paper I want from you but the fortress." "But if the garrison surrenders unconditionally, it is dishonored." "We cannot honor you or dishonor you here, just as we cannot honor or dishonor the French nation. We have nothing in common with you."

Some have found in these replies the eloquence of tragedy, the influence of Mirabeau. No doubt Saint-Just expressed the conviction that he was at Landau by the will of the people. But at the same time he makes it clear that he could not be dislodged by the power of bayonets: "Landau or death." He does not devise "noble replies," he expresses an epic absolute. "You don't make revolutions by halves," is akin to the inscription at Thermopylae ("Passer-by, go tell Lacedaemonia—those who died here fell in accordance with its laws"), and belongs to the same world as the gesture of Mucius Scoevola, as the return of Regulus to Carthage, and Alexander's setting fire to his fleet. For, "One cannot rule innocently." A great man is vulnerable by virtue of the multiple aspects of his character, even though sometimes it is this very multiplicity which makes him great; Saint-Just admits multiplicity only through his choice of means. His invulnerability recalls—strangely enough—that of Joan of Arc at Rouen, because their replies were on a higher plane than the questions that were put to them. "Was Saint Michael naked?" "Do you think God too poor to dress his angels? . . ."

If Saint-Just was a terrible accuser, it is because he was the most profound conscience of the Revolution, and this not because he was austere (though he was that), but because he was monolithic—seemingly in an intellectual sense, but actually in an ethical and almost religious sense (Mohammed, after all, was also a legislator). We know the obsessive "We must" of his notes. In the Committee of Public Safety, with the army of Sambre-et-Meuse, at the Police Department, to think, for him, meant to define a duty. Like certain characters of Claudel, like so many characters of Dostoevsky, whose simple and implacable logic, sometimes verging on insanity, he shares (for the Republic to survive it was necessary for all those who could stand in its way to die), he lives within a truth which demands to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

be lived and not merely believed, which wants to convince only in order to convert. On a pedestal of definitions he erects the indefinable. Already, at the trial of the King, he had forced sensitive souls and reasonable minds to see looming behind the stage-sets of the period, which he removed one by one, the deep night of the Revolution; and the orator who followed him seemed ridiculous in returning to questions of legality. Like the prophets, he endowed the mystery with the self-evidence of truth. For most of his audience as for him, the Republic was not merely a system of government, but above all an Apocalypse, and the hope of an unknown world. He passionately upheld the revolutionary dream in convincing the Convention that its mission was to accomplish exemplary acts—or to die. He forced the men who wanted to talk like the great Romans to live like them; and so he dominated them, up until the day when, the enemy defeated, his death could only be brought about by the guillotine: it was thanks to the victory at Fleurus that they could condemn him.

Most of them wanted nothing more than to re-establish the state, to have power in it; the Directory proved this to the hilt. Still, victory was necessary for this. But what did Saint-Just want? He seems to have aimed at exemplary acts for their own sake; more exactly, in order to testify to the truth which possessed him. Often in this book, as we follow him from page to page, he seems to call upon death as the impending and necessary end to his life. Does he condemn all the more ruthlessly, all the more impersonally too, because he wants to be condemned himself? Against this backdrop of victories (from his arrival at the Convention until the ninth of Thermidor, he was not once defeated) one sees the little black shadow of Lenin dancing in the snow of the Kremlin, and saying to the amazement of the people's commissars: "We have held out one day longer than the Paris Commune!"

The Goddess of Reason seemed ridiculous to Saint-Just. He believed vaguely in the Supreme Being, strongly in the immortality of the soul. Perhaps his last word was in "that independent life which I have won for myself in the centuries to come and in the empyrean." It was guaranteed less by posterity than by a heroic absolute. To explain Saint-Just, the nineteenth century tried to mix rationalism with individualism, but nineteenth-century individualism, as we see it in Napoleon and in the heroes of Balzac, is acquisitive; it is the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

typical attitude by which the petty bourgeois transforms himself into the aristocrat of fiction. The Rastignacs envy the power of Saint-Just, but they regard him less as a model than as a kind of wild man, as Danton had already called him. What could he teach a politician, an ambitious historian of the Second Empire or the Third Republic, a Rubempré, or even a Julien Sorel? Energy? Is there any relation between skill in the social chess game that dazzled them, and the conduct of a legendary action? between the complacency with which they paint their portraits, and the fury with which he carves out his statue? For this faceless statue is one of the symbols of the Republic, along with the *Marseillaise,* the flags of the Year II (to which he gave their colors), and the guillotine. . . . He seems to have been very little interested in his own personality: this book, which brings together everything that is known about him, gives us almost nothing of his personal quality. Proud he certainly was; with a sacerdotal pride quite different from vanity. He wanted to be only his deeds, and these deeds to be exemplary. But while the theatrical deed clothes the individual, the exemplary deed strips him bare. This supreme somnambulist passes through the Terror like Lady Macbeth through the castle of Dunsinane, but the only ghost that haunts him is the Republic, and the bloody hands he extends are the hands of justice. There were no "royal whims" for Saint-Just.

"I wanted a Republic which everyone would have loved," said Desmoulins sadly. What was it when it ceased to be the promise of a Golden Age, when it became a reality? First of all, it became a target for kings; Saint-Just was, with Carnot, the Republic's most efficient defender. We have seen that his earliest glamour came from his will to be the sword of freedom.

"Freedom consists in being ruled by rational laws." If it consisted only in that he would have been forgotten long ago. But on the eve of Fleurus, the Revolution was still a vast imaginary domain. Contrary to Michelet, to Victor Hugo—contrary above all to the views of the Commune—many historians have tried to prove that the course of the Revolution was determined by the conflict of class interests. But we know that Victor Hugo did not invent Fleurus, and that the night of the fourth of August, in which the nobility signed

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

away their privileges, cannot be accounted for entirely by the self-interest of that class.

Certain experiences have taught our century that revolutions are *also* revolutionary. The Republic, a reality because it was threatened, was in other respects a world outside the grip of destiny: one in which "men shall have lived for a day—as their hearts dictated." As their dreams dictated above all: in that trance which the legend implies, and which none of the avowed aims of the Republic—happiness or justice—could explain. The revolutionary exaltation subsists on the future or on the unknown, and it wears off. For Saint-Just it was the condition of *those who aim at glory,* and look on their present as the imagination views the legendary past. As for the future, he thought it would follow from the institutions he planned; perhaps even more from glory, as if glory held a promise greater than that of institutions, as if a heroic world would necessarily beget a world delivered. How many times this man obsessed with greatness acted as though he were staking his all! His ability to make men live heroically, to transform defeated troops into the soldiers of the Year II, he put at the service of the Republic *which had no time to be born.* His ruthless greatness seemed to be a pledge of the merciful greatness of that Republic, guillotined with him. But it was not a Sparta of twenty million souls, we feel, that perished with him. He often talked of peace, of neutrality, like Napoleon. But he knew his Republic was contagious; the kings knew it too, and Thermidor only delayed the Napoleonic epic to come. True, he did not have the Emperor's military genius. Neither did Mohammed or Stalin. The Revolution, driven out by the husband of Marie Louise, prays like a poor faithful beggar woman at the grave of the murderer of Marie Antoinette, and one rough draft of the poem of France tells the story of the army of Sambre-et-Meuse which became *La Grande Armée.* For the Republic of Saint-Just foreshadowed, not the perfect state, but a tide of conquest like that of Islam.

Some of his magic comes from his powers of expression, which were not, properly speaking, literary. His speeches and notes as a whole are addressed only to the specialists; his genius is manifested in isolated phrases to which his acts gave a meaning that resounds through the centuries because it is so impersonal, it seems to be the very language of history. He wanted to live in history as the saints

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lived in their faith, to be absorbed in the Republic as the saints are lost in God. If dead republics could be brought to life, with what voice would that of the Year II speak, after Danton was executed, if not with his? To live in history was to demand a few eternal dreams in return for unremitting service to the nation. In his time, which was one of the greatest periods of hope, no one hoped so passionately as he to *change man* by compelling him to undertake an epic action.

And perhaps his aura comes from the fact that the blade, falling in the evening sun, put an end not only to the murderer of Louis XVI, the prosecutor of Danton, the architect of Fleurus, but to the greatest adventure of the Revolution.

(*Translated from the French by Lionel Abel*)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Augusta Walker

ALLEGORY: A LIGHT CONCEIT

Suppose a man walking home from work across a field were to come upon a group of angels sitting around in a circle talking about some project for which the earth had been requisitioned. After peering through the bushes for a while to see what he could find out, trying not to be caught, and after recovering a little from whatever state the spectacle had thrown him into, he would probably go home and wonder what to do next.

Obviously he could not go on doing whatever he had been doing before. He would be like a man who had spent his life in a factory, working at some tiny job on a piece of machinery, the purpose of which he had not the faintest idea about, and who then suddenly found out what it was for. Whether this use were good or bad, important or trivial, it would probably be a shock to him. He would see a kind of aberration in his whole life; it would all look slightly deflected from the direction he might have lived it in if he had been turning his screwdriver with that knowledge in mind.

The question would be whether or not to tell other people about the purpose of the machine or the council of angels. The enlightened one could scarcely help noticing the irrelevance of most things that people did, and as he went around watching, he would begin to feel that these irrelevancies were becoming his responsibility. One reason why he had not rushed out to tell everybody in the first place was that he knew nobody would believe him. Besides, he could think of no way to tell it. All of our words are closely attached to material things, even words for abstractions. The word "angel" is a name that we apply to a hypothetical being translated into earthly existence.

But not to tell would be to negate this curious gift, this dubious blessing bestowed upon him. And worse still than stoppering himself

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

up, would be to tell and not be believed. Then he would soon be a mad prophet on the street corners, than which nothing embarrasses us or excites our ridicule more. He would be raging wild-eyed and shaggy-haired up and down the world, hating the human race for its stupidity. If he does not make his peace in some way by finding some compromise between what he has to tell and what he succeeds in telling, he will likely end his days tragically in madness and chains, or execution, or suicide.

But if nature has seen fit to bestow a vision upon him, maybe it will be consistent enough (an assumption of perhaps unwarranted faith) to bestow on him also the sense to work out partial solutions to his problem. There is really after all not much choice in the terms for presenting angels to people because the only possible ones are the terms of people themselves. No form has more meaning to us than our own because we have seen no higher one, bad though it often is. So he has only to think of creatures like us but bigger and stronger, and if the council of angels struck him as very beautiful, and overpowered him with a sense of the honor it conferred upon the earth by being there and upon him as its spectator, he would describe them with all the beauty possible to imagine in human form: idealized bodies in glittering dress, and a few borrowed conveniences such as wings.

He would have to tell what he knew about the ulterior designs for which the earth was requisitioned through what he saw of their repercussions on the lives of people; and since this is only the tiniest segment of their repercussions in space, he could invent some little fiction in place of the real interstellar drama which would in some way account for its effects. He would do this, not to hide anything or to make a mystery of it, as he would undoubtedly be accused of doing, but because in the first place, he could not have got a complete picture of the whole thing himself, and in the second place, even if he had, he must reduce it in size and simplify it in concept in proportion to the rest of his story and the scope of his hearers.

He could give his superhuman beings names and present them in personal squabbles over love affairs or in competition for power—things that people know about. He could make them inhabit the highest mountain on earth, since this location is out of the sight but still within the concept of a general audience. They could drag

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

humans into their affairs by perhaps making a mortal the judge of a beauty contest among their women, and then bribing him, so that at length he gets in trouble and throws his own nation into war. And so there is a war, which we can now see is really a little part of the requisitioning, something going on over our heads: a war which, even though we have pulled it down on ourselves, we seemed not able to prevent, and the precipitating factor of which, even though it be of our own making, we suspect is not the real cause.

To dramatize by fantasy the shaking up of a few little earthly towns on the remote edge of some cosmic doings is not much of a way to explain the cosmic doings, but it is infinitely better than no way at all to account for something that would otherwise go forever unaccounted for.

A story in this spirit will be the most appropriate if people believe that they occupy the whole of the universe and that the earth is the only place there is. Then the human characters can be individual heroes in an aura of fame, their names well known to the beings on the mountain, who are bound to respect and even to be a little wary of them. In conflict, though these beings are more powerful and always the ones to determine what ultimately happens, man can still stand up against them with stature and dignity, even foil them from time to time in little ways if he is clever. And in his defeat he can still have his defiance—he can still cut a splendid, tragic figure on the landscape.

But maybe our visionary lives in a time when everybody knows that the earth is not the total of creation, and he can no longer talk to people as though they thought it was. The investigators have pried and found out what perhaps they did not want to know, that the whole thing is a violently outflung swirl of sparks and dirt, of which the earth is one of the tiniest dirt specks, and that man grew out of the animals inadequately equipped for life upon it. They have found it out, and slowly everybody, after long resistance, has been told and become resigned and stopped thinking about it. So our spectator cannot find it in his heart to represent his angels as splendid-winged creatures holding council on the earth to its glorification: rather they are something like a committee of oil men on their way from New York to San Francisco, stopping over in some drab little western town to look glumly around and estimate any possible utility. They

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

feel a slight nausea looking out from the train station through the gray smoke-dust at the dreary water tower and grain elevator and an oil tank or two, and they would rather not bother, only it is a part of their job. Perhaps they decide after all that it wasn't worth the stop. Thus the angels holding a hurried meeting might look to our observer, who stands gaping through the bushes like a barefoot child peeking through a fence at the oil committee, feeling that not only is he in no danger of being caught, but that he cannot make his presence known to them. That there is in fact no way he can get their attention, even he who has received the grace of vision.

He might then describe in his story a staff of fat, sleepy gods in dingy office suits who live in a mist-hidden stronghold on a hill, from which all roads seem to slink and sidle away. They never come down except for some unavoidable business matter; they conduct all their affairs on tons of paper, which they stuff into bursting files, and they have no information about mortals except through dreary and dusty reports, indirectly forwarded, which are always wrong, always misplaced, and usually never read.

At any rate, the man who saw would tell his story as best he could, modified by however he viewed and felt about the spectacle, and by the possibilities and limitations of whatever kind of world he lived in, as well as his own possibilities and limitations. And people would listen because in spite of all he had done to tame it, it would still be an awesome and marvelous story. Some of his listeners would take it to mean just what he said, and they would ask wonderingly, "Did that really happen? Were there really men with wings who flew from the sky to the ground, and could make people do whatever they wanted, and then disappear?" Or, "Is there really a bunch of indifferent mortgage-closers up there who tangle up our lives in a bad filing system?" Others among the listeners would say he lied, that he knew it wasn't so and had just made it up out of his head—which charge, awkwardly enough, he would be in no position to deny. But a few would see that he was really trying to talk about something else; they might even puzzle out a little of what it was he was trying to talk about.

An allegory is a kind of yarn made up to inveigle its audience into a larger idea, and the obvious difference between it and a lie is that it is always meant to lead, whereas a lie is meant to mislead.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It is a simplification of a complex thing. It is not a complex thing made easy, for in its fullest meaning it is no easier to understand than the original concept was. But it is more accessible because, having meaning on several planes, it can lead its audience step by step, at least as far as they can individually go. It is never a complication of a simple thing, which perversion would render it fraudulent.

An allegory is not meant to hide anything, an accusation frequently brought against it. It is true that if our visionary went around telling everybody indiscriminately that he had seen angels in his field, he would make himself a public charge. He would soon be behind bars, and maybe finished off with torture and burning. Joan was only one case. His business, however, is to make himself understood rather than to save himself from burning, and conversely, therefore, it is to save himself from burning in order to make himself understood. But a device for keeping an idea in the dark, necessary though it may be at times, is not an allegory. Allegory has nothing to hide, and it has everything to try to reveal.

II Illustration: Kafka's "The Burrow"

Kafka never tells what kind of creature it is that lives in the burrow. We are never given any indication of its size, except relatively, when it talks about the "small fry" whose burrows interlace its own without causing it annoyance, and a few of which it catches and eats. As the "small fry" are not identified either, we still have no hint of size. We may think of them as field mice. But since Kafka has evidently been careful not to identify any creature, he must intend to leave the concept open, thereby giving it an elasticity which enables it to fit analogical situations of any size. Little is told us either about the animal's biological characteristics. He lives in a place that he has made for himself, in the most protected part of which he has stored a quantity of food supplies, and sometimes he goes out to forage in the open. Most creatures, including people, live in a similar way.

He has one purpose in life: to protect himself from his enemies. We are never told what his enemies are, and the creature does not seem quite to know himself. It seems he has never been attacked by one, and so is not informed as to their methods. Therefore he

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

must prepare his burrow against any kind of attack, and this he does by perpetual and incredible industry.

He does talk uncertainly about some great earth-creatures that he has heard tell of but never seen. He says, "Not even legend can describe them. Their very victims can scarcely have seen them; they come, you hear the scratching of their claws just under you in the ground, which is their element, and already you are lost. Here it is of no avail to console yourself with the thought that you are in your own house; far rather you are in theirs."

But the only thing he can do is to go on building and rebuilding his house on the assumption that it must be his own if he made it. He began the construction of it in his youth on a less ambitious plan, and this initial part with its little involuted passageways has now become the entrance, intended to confound the invader. He continued to build on a larger plan, and kept remodeling. The rest of the burrow is ingeniously devised: intricate passages, dead-end corridors, emergency supply cells, and burglar traps. Sometimes he sits back and feels happy and safe in his burrow. But his happiness depends upon his safety, and this is in fact only an illusive, at best a periodic thing. Between these periods he has days of agonized fear, starting from sleep in terror at some dream, realizing all the inadequacies of his defenses, and he sets out feverishly, often in the middle of the night, sleep-grogged but panicky, to reorganize his whole dwelling, to make new places of hiding, to tug his stores around and redistribute them for newly conceived hazards.

His burrow has a single opening carefully covered with moss, and he spends much of his life deciding and re-deciding whether or not he needs another one. A second one would double the possibility of an enemy's entrance, but it would also provide him with an emergency exit. It would make his burrow vulnerable at both ends, but he might well employ each in turn as a point of observation to see if the other is being attempted. The doorway problem is one of his daily torments. Sometimes he hides outside in the bushes for hours to see if there is any kind of prowler aware of its existence.

So he lives fluctuating between the sensations of security and terror, devoting himself to frantic slavery for the defense of his life and his home. No enemy ever appears, as far as we know from the story, and there is no sound in the peaceful stillness of his hallways

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

except the light rustling of the mice, or whatever they are, burrowing their holes through his, at once intruders upon and victims to him.

But toward the end there is a new noise, one he cannot understand. At first he thinks it is a horde of little creatures besetting him, and he begins to make preparations with trenches to trap them. He waits for a long time, and the noise continues, but no horde of mice arrives. Frenzy possesses him. He must find some other explanation, so that he may defend himself accordingly. The noise, which resolves itself into a continuous whistling sound, seems to have no location; it comes from all sides, sometimes distant, sometimes near. He finds himself calling it "The Whistler" and thinking of it as one big animal rather than many small ones. He begins to suspect that it is surrounding him, and that all the barricades to which he has dedicated his life are nothing against this. The big beast will not even see his barricades, it is likely not even aware of him. It will crash through his dwelling and demolish everything.

And the noise continues. We leave him delivered up to terror, utterly helpless in his hole.

What the creature does not realize is that the new and bigger being perhaps drilling a burrow of its own in his vicinity is to him as he is to the mice. He has told us in an awed and almost reverent way, as if he were talking in a whisper, like primitives about God, of the big earth-creatures that devour you, and that treat you not as though you were in your own house but in theirs. This is the way he treats the "small fry." They are just creeping about their own business, digging their own minute passages which make a network through his. They don't bother him much. When he feels hungry, he catches and eats a few; otherwise he leaves them alone.

Obviously they don't know he is there, for they don't wish to be eaten and would scramble away in panic if they knew. As he has said about the big earth creatures, "Their very victims can scarcely have seen them." He is only death that descends upon the mice from the unknown. There is no way for them to find out about him or to learn to defend themselves against him. His burrow is not recognizable to them as belonging to another creature. From their point of view it is only something put there by nature like caves and valleys, and if they are at all conscious of him or his scratching in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the earth, it must be only as a big rumbling waterfall noise, forever unexplainable. Perhaps they call him "The Rumbler," or from the sound of his breath "The Wheezer," and they think of him as something supernatural because he cannot otherwise be imagined. Perhaps they live in fear of him, but not knowing where he is, don't know how to keep out of his way. At any rate, they are only building their own homes in what, as far as they can see, is their own real estate, the earth that they were created into and have no choice but to live in. And yet they must from time to time have an uneasy feeling that they are trespassing. Else why are they so furtive?

Why indeed is our protagonist himself so furtive? Why must he devote his life to hiding? Does he not have a deep-seated sense of guilt that he is after all on somebody's else's property, and that when the big earth-creature comes, it will treat him so? Maybe this continuous noise that he hears is that of a tractor plowing his field, sometimes near, sometimes farther away as it circles around, and at some inevitable moment, in spite of the piece of moss so carefully placed over his entrance, the walls so hard-packed by his bleeding forehead, the tricky blind alleys, it will come crashing over his head and crush him out of existence.

In other words, he has built himself a medieval fortress against a hydrogen bomb, which is the curious position that the human race now finds itself in. We have spent our history like this: raising indestructible walls around cities perched on impregnable rocks, surrounding ourselves with swarms of battleships and flocks of fighter planes, burrowing elaborate underground refuges, devising intricate systems of danger detection and warning, always more advanced and efficient. But here we stand at last defenseless against this new thing that has leaped into being, and all our contrivances against our enemies are absurd and pitiful against this. To abandon our burrows and run elsewhere is just as silly. There is nowhere to go.

Kafka's animal draws an inverted moral from his own story: that he has wasted his youth in not being industrious enough. He had a warning once when he was too young to be serious. He heard a noise similar to this one, but listened to it with more curiosity than fear, resting a while from the labor of digging his newly-begun home. ("I have rested far too often from my labors all my life," he says.) At that time he even thought, "Perhaps I am in somebody else's bur-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

row." But the noise, after approaching a while, went away, as though it had changed its mind or just passed by without noticing him. Now, his youth gone, he blames himself for the laziness and improvidence of it.

He is like the old men who regret the carefree happiness of their boyhood when they could have been working to pad themselves against the fears and insecurity of age, and who wrangle with their sons to make them do better.

What, after all, could they have done against the hydrogen bomb? A neat bank account, some solid investments, a good suburban house, the business ready to be turned over to well-trained heirs—all this against the explosion of the world.

He is like the miserable little woman who, with a kind of insanity, is always hiding herself and her belongings from a burglar-murderer whom she momently expects to break into her apartment. She has double locks and chains on her doors, bars over her windows, several kinds of theft and life insurance, and secret understandings with the elevator man and house superintendent. She hears noises at night and is obsessed with the sense of someone sneaking around. She is always locking her little things in trunks and cupboards and hiding the keys. Standing in the hallway, she repeats to her neighbors in a whisper the latest burglary account in the newspaper. Nobody ever comes to cut her throat or steal her precious teacups and furs and silverware that she cares so much about. Then maybe one day she is struck by lightning on the telephone while she describes some new murder to a friend.

But they might as well be providing themselves with life insurance, these people, as to be doing anything at all. If they were not doing that, what else would they do? It is not easy to find out how not to waste one's life.

The pitiful thing about them is not that they will, after all their slavery to security, inevitably be destroyed, but that they were, preceding their inevitable destruction, slaves to security. Surely the little creature in his burrow has wasted his life and will go on wasting it to the end. The time of his youth that he regrets is probably the only time in which he ever did anything that was not wasted, for all the rest was in preparation to deny death, and death will come anyway. There is nothing effective that he can do against this big

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

destroyer, for he is too small to conceive of it, and this is not his fault or anyone's. It is a phenomenon of creation. All his wretched drudging and grubbing, scheming and hoarding, waking in a cold sweat at night to plunge into the re-doing of everything—all this has been against an enemy that is perhaps sitting over him the whole time, watching and blinking, as a cat watches, half bored, half predatory, the maneuvering of a frightened bug racing in and out of the cracks under its paw. Maybe the cat will leave the bug alone a long time because he is really not interested in it, but then at some totally unpredictable instant, without purpose or malice, reach out his paw and smash it.

Quite surely Kafka was not thinking of hydrogen bombs, for he did not know about them. There is not, in fact, any word of Kafka's story that could not have been written in 1000 B. C., since animals lived in burrows then just as they do now, and written by Homer himself, with the same significance for the people then that it has now. Only to them the earth was the kingdom of creation and humans were the royalty of it, and so Homer spoke in the terms that expressed himself and them. He told of the splendor of men in their ships and towers rather than the misery and fear of a rodent in its hole. But they both knew the same thing, these allegorists with nearly three millennia between them, during which we so reluctantly retired from our presumptuous post as the sum total of what there is, to being merely and microscopically lost in the swirl of it—they knew the same thing, and were saying it each in his own language: that there is a vast calamity with which we cannot cope, and that we would do best to live with what dignity and contentment we can attain, coping with what we can, not fearing to meet that calamity when it comes, not wasting what time has been allotted us by weaving mosquito nets against it. That we would do best to accept the fact that we own no property, that we are squatters by force upon a planet we didn't make for ourselves. And how are we to know indeed that it is not somebody else's planet, and we insects sucking at a fruit on a tree that somebody else has raised? That security is not possible for us any more than for the birds that hop on our lawns, whose every worm is yanked up and gobbled in haste and trembling due to lurking enemies—any more than for the worm itself, who would rather not be gobbled. That we, like all other earth-creatures,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

share a disputed world, and even more than we have need to mitigate the disputes, have we need of the spirit to live with them, for to solve them all is not in our power. The animal's burrow has been requisitioned, maybe by a bigger animal who can scarcely be challenged in his right to incorporate it into his own, or by the farmer with the tractor who needs the field for his corn planting. It is too bad. It is now time for him to meet his calamity. The city of Troy was requisitioned—the gods had business of their own with it, to which they stirred up the Greeks by a few simple tricks.

Both were thinking of something beyond hydrogen bombs, and maybe they knew in their secret hearts what they were thinking of. But there are no adequate images. The problem is to get it into any image, and if one can be found that will do for all times and places and be stretchable for the sizes of all minds—that may even sometimes succeed in stretching the mind—much more could not be asked.

This is why Kafka does not identify the creature. It could be anything. To a simple person it is at least a little animal working itself to death for nothing. To another it suggests the old lady next door who feared a murderer and was struck by lightning, or the old man nagging at his sons to work hard and put their money in the bank. Some of us think of the war that nothing seems able to stop. And perhaps somebody will go all the way to the vision and see what it really is that comes at last to take away from us this beloved life, so perilously and wondrously festooned between the two rolling clouds of darkness that spurted it out and will suck it back in again.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

POEMS

OLD WOMAN'S MEDITATION

I

On love's worst ugly day,
The weeds hiss at the edge of the field,
The small winds make their chilly indictments.
Elsewhere, in houses, even pails can be sad;
While stones loosen on the obscure hillside,
And a tree tilts from its roots,
Toppling down an embankment.

The spirit moves, but not always upward,
While animals eat to the north,
And the shale slides an inch in the talus,
The bleak wind eats at the weak plateau,
And the sun brings joy to some.
But the rind, often, hates the life within.

How can I rest in the days of my slowness?
I've become a strange piece of flesh,
Nervous and cold, bird-furtive, whiskery,
With a cheek soft as a hound's ear.
What's left is light as a seed;
I need an old crone's knowing.

II

Often I think of myself as riding—
Alone, on a bus through western country.
I sit above the back wheels, where the jolts are hardest,
And we bounce and sway along toward the midnight,
The lights tilting up, skyward, as we come over a little rise,
Then down, as we roll like a boat from a wave-crest.
All journeys, I think, are the same:
The movement is forward, after a few wavers,
And for a while we are all alone,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Busy, obvious with ourselves,
The drunken soldier, the old lady with her peppermints;
And we ride, we ride, taking the curves
Somewhat closer, the trucks coming
Down from behind the last ranges,
Their black shapes breaking past;
And the air claps between us,
Blasting the frosted windows,
And I seem to go backward,
Backward in time:

> Two song sparrows, one within a greenhouse,
> Shuttling its throat while perched on a windvent,
> And another, outside, in the bright day,
> With a wind from the west and the trees all in motion.
> One sang, then the other,
> The songs tumbling over and under the glass,
> And the men beneath them wheeling in dirt to the cement benches,
> The laden wheelbarrows creaking and swaying,
> And the up-spring of the plank when a foot left the runway.

Journey within a journey:
The ticket mislaid or lost, the gate
Inaccessible, the boat always pulling out
From the rickety wooden dock,
The children waving;
Or two horses plunging in snow, their lines tangled,
A great wooden sleigh careening behind them,
Swerving up a steep embankment.
For a moment they stand above me,
Their black skins shuddering:
Then they lurch forward,
Lunging down a hillside.

III

As when silt drifts and sifts down through muddy pond-water,
Settling in small beads around weeds and sunken branches,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And one crab, tentative, hunches himself before moving along the bottom,
Grotesque, awkward, his extended eyes looking at nothing in particular,
Only a few bubbles loosening from the ill-matched tentacles,
The tail and smaller legs slipping and sliding slowly backward,—
So the spirit tries for another life,
Another way and place in which to continue;
Or a salmon, tired, moving up a shallow stream,
Nudges into a back-eddy, a sandy inlet,
Bumping against sticks and bottom-stones, then swinging
Around, back into the tiny maincurrent, the rush of brownish-white water,
Still swimming forward—
So, I suppose, the spirit journeys.

IV

I have gone before into the waste lonely places
Behind the eye; the lost acres at the edge of smoky cities.
What's beyond never crumbles like an embankment,
Explodes like a rose, or thrusts wings over the Caribbean.
There are no pursuing forms, faces on walls:
Only the motes of dust in the immaculate hallways,
The darkness of falling hair, the warnings from lint and spiders,
The vines graying to a fine powder.
There is no riven tree, or lamb dropped by an eagle.

There are still times, morning and evening:
The cerulean, high in the elm,
Thin and insistent as a cicada,
And the far phoebe, singing,
The long plaintive notes floating down,
Drifting through the leaves, oak and maple,
Or the whippoorwill, along the smoky ridges,
A single bird calling and calling;
A fume reminds me, drifting across wet gravel;
A cold wind comes over stones;
A flame, intense, visible,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Plays over the dry pods,
Runs fitfully along the stubble,
Moves over the field,
Without burning.

In such times, lacking a god,
I am still happy.

Theodore Roethke

GULLIVER

Doll is doll and not unreal,
Arms, legs, all parts comply
To laws of artifice as well
As those that advance the play,
Each flaw a measure by this scale;
Mind, consenting, serves the actual.

No larger than a span, each detail
Magnified, contracted to an inch:
A ship no bigger than a thumb-nail,
A thread for rope around the winch
And for a map our own disparity,
Sets sail upon a mirrored sea.

Doll and ship are thereby real, since
What but love constricts the image
And circumscribes all variance?
A compass used that we may gauge
Our movements to and from the center—
This door we guard, too large to enter.

Against such habitual task and need
Grows the bean-stalk leisure of the mad:
Not ship, doll, fever, but the seed
Of final silence in the shortened bed.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In scarlet livery stitched with gold
Ride the coachmen love has sold—

The doll may wither to our rage
Though we, enlarged, cannot conceal
Or multiply, grown huge with age:
Soldiers with wounds too large to heal,
Lovers with tears like suns or moons
In which the doll-like image drowns.

As giants to inhabit the margins
Not the world, our smallest gesture
Whelms and overthrows domains
We would but touch: miniature
Towers, battlements we cannot gain
Who loom above the inch-wide prison.

Not imagination but flesh itself
Is fed by these; mind, the poorest
Station, guarded by the doll of self,
Gates of irony by dogs of sawdust
Kept. The child, refused, will lie
Threadbare in the costumes we deny.

The heart, enormous, grows and grows
To cast a bean-stalk shadow over
This small world; maimed, it knows
How huge those faults it cannot cover,
Being flesh and magnified—
How small the footsteps of its bride.

Behind the sun a compass will contract,
Inch by inch the world shrinks
Into a syllable of ice; so exact
The tiny map that an eyelash links
The continents; our own giant bones
Adrift like ship-wrecked skeletons.

Patricia Coombs

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Vladimir Nabokov

PROBLEMS OF TRANSLATION: "ONEGIN" IN ENGLISH

I constantly find in reviews of verse translations the following kind of thing that sends me into spasms of helpless fury: "Mr. (or Miss) So-and-so's translation reads smoothly." In other words, the reviewer of the "translation," who neither has, nor would be able to have, without special study, any knowledge whatsoever of the original, praises as "readable" an imitation only because the drudge or the rhymster has substituted easy platitudes for the breathtaking intricacies of the text. "Readable," indeed! A schoolboy's boner is less of a mockery in regard to the ancient masterpiece than its commercial interpretation or poetization. "Rhyme" rhymes with "crime," when Homer or *Hamlet* are rhymed. The term "free translation" smacks of knavery and tyranny. It is when the translator sets out to render the "spirit"—not the textual sense—that he begins to traduce his author. The clumsiest literal translation is a thousand times more useful than the prettiest paraphrase.

For the last five years or so I have been engaged, on and off, in translating and annotating Pushkin's *Onegin*. In the course of this work I have learned some facts and come to certain conclusions. First, the facts.

The novel is concerned with the afflictions, affections and fortunes of three young men—Onegin, the bitter lean fop, Lenski, the temperamental minor poet, and Pushkin, their friend—and of three young ladies—Tatiana, Olga, and Pushkin's Muse. Its events take place between the end of 1819 and the spring of 1825. The scene shifts from the capital to the countryside (midway between Opochka and Moscow), and thence to Moscow and back to Petersburg. There is a description of a young rake's day in town; rural landscapes and rural libraries; a dream and a duel; various festivities in country

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and city; and a variety of romantic, satirical and bibliographic digressions that lend wonderful depth and color to the thing.

Onegin himself is, of course, a literary phenomenon, not a local or historical one. Childe Harold, the hero of Byron's "romaunt" (1812), whose "early youth [had been] misspent in maddest whim," who has "moping fits," who is bid to loath his present state by a "weariness which springs from all [he] meets," is really only a relative, not the direct prototype, of Onegin. The latter is less "a Muscovite in Harold's cloak" than a descendant of many fantastic Frenchmen such as Chateaubriand's *René,* who was aware of existing only through a *"profond sentiment d'ennui."* Pushkin speaks of Onegin's spleen or "chondria" (the English "hypo" and the Russian "chondria" or *"handra"* represent a neat division of linguistic labor on the part of two nations) as of "a malady the cause of which it seems high time to find." To this search Russian critics applied themselves with commendable zeal, accumulating during the last one hundred and thirty years one of the most somniferous masses of comments known to civilized man. Even a special term for Onegin's "sickness" has been invented (*Oneginstvo*); and thousands of pages have been devoted to him as a "type" of something or other. Modern Soviet critics standing on a tower of soapboxes provided a hundred years ago by Belinski, Herzen, and many others, diagnosed Onegin's sickness as the result of "Tzarist despotism." Thus a character borrowed from books but brilliantly recomposed by a great poet to whom life and library were one, placed by that poet within a brilliantly reconstructed environment, and played with by him in a succession of compositional patterns—lyrical impersonations, tomfooleries of genius, literary parodies, stylized epistles, and so on—is treated by Russian commentators as a sociological and historical phenomenon typical of Alexander the First's regime: alas, this tendency to generalize and vulgarize the unique fancy of an individual genius has also its advocates in this country.

Actually there has never been anything especially local or time-significant in hypochondria, misanthropy, ennui, the blues, *Weltschmerz,* etc. By 1820, ennui was a seasoned literary cliché of characterization which Pushkin could toy with at his leisure. French fiction of the eighteenth century is full of young characters suffering from the spleen. It was a convenient device to keep one's hero on the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

move. Byron gave it a new thrill; René, Adolphe, and their co-sufferers received a transfusion of demon blood.

Evgeniy Onegin is a Russian novel in verse. Pushkin worked at it from May 1823 to October 1831. The first complete edition appeared in the spring of 1833 in St. Petersburg; there is a well-preserved specimen of this edition at the Houghton Library, Harvard University. *Onegin* has eight chapters and consists of 5,551 lines, all of which, except a song of eighteen unrhymed lines (in trochaic trimeter), are in iambic tetrameter, rhymed. The main body of the work contains, apart from two freely rhymed epistles, 366 stanzas, each of fourteen lines, with a fixed rhyme pattern: ababeeccddiff (the vowels indicate the feminine rhymes, the consonants the masculine ones). Its resemblance to the sonnet is obvious. Its octet consists of an elegiac quatrain and of two couplets, its sestet of a closed quatrain and a couplet. This hyperborean freak is far removed from the Petrarchan pattern, but is distinctly related to Malherbe's and Surrey's variations.

The tetrametric, or "anacreontic," sonnet was introduced in France by Scévole de Sainte-Marthe in 1579; and it was once tried by Shakespeare (Sonnet CXLV: "Those lips that Love's own hand did make," with a rhyme scheme "make-hate-sake: state-come-sweet-doom-greet: end-day-fiend-away. Threw-you"). The *Onegin* stanza would be technically an English anacreontic sonnet had not the second quatrain consisted of two couplets instead of being closed or alternate. The novelty of Pushkin's freak sonnet is that its first twelve lines include the greatest variation in rhyme sequence possible within a three-quatrain frame: alternate, paired, and closed. However, it is really from the French, not from the English, that Pushkin derived the idea for this new kind of stanza. He knew his Malherbe well—and Malherbe had composed several sonnets (see for example, *"A Rabel, peintre, sur un livre de fleurs,"* 1630) in tetrameter, with four rhymes in the octet and assymetrical quatrains (the first alternately rhymed, the second closed), but of course Malherbe's sestet was the classical one, never clinched with a couplet in the English fashion. We have to look elsewhere for Pushkin's third quatrain and for his epigrammatic couplet—namely in French light verse of the seventeenth and eighteenth century. In one of Gresset's *"Epîtres"* (*"Au*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Père Bougeant, jésuite") the Onegin sestet is exactly represented by the lines

Mais pourquoi donner au mystère,
Pourquoi reprocher au hazard
De ce prompt et triste départ
La cause trop involontaire?
Oui, vous seriez encore à nous
Si vous étiez vous-même à vous.

Theoretically speaking, it is not impossible that a complete *Onegin* stanza may be found embedded somewhere in the endless "Epistles" of those periwigged bores, just as its sequence of rhymes is found in LaFontaine's *Contes* (e.g., *"Nicaise,"* 48-61) and in Pushkin's own freely-rhymed *Ruslan i Lyudmila,* composed in his youth (see the last section of Canto Three, from *Za otdalyonnïmi godami* to *skazal mne vazhno Chernomor*). In this Pushkinian pseudo-sonnet the opening quatrain, with its brilliant alternate rhymes, and the closing couplet, with its epigrammatic click, are in greater evidence than the intermediate parts, as if we were being shown first the pattern on one side of an immobile sphere which would then start to revolve, blurring the colors, and presently would come to a stop, revealing clearly again a smaller pattern on its opposite side.

As already said, there are in *Onegin* more than 300 stanzas of this kind. We have moreover fragments of two additional chapters and numerous stanzas canceled by Pushkin, some of them sparkling with more originality and beauty than any in the Cantos from which he excluded them before publication. All this matter, as well as Pushkin's own commentaries, the variants, epigraphs, dedications, and so forth, must be of course translated too, in appendices and notes.

II

Russian poetry is affected by the following six characteristics of language and prosody:

1. The number of rhymes, both masculine and feminine (i.e., single and double), is incomparably greater than in English and leads to the cult of the rare and the rich. As in French, the *consonne d'appui* is obligatory in masculine rhymes and aesthetically valued in feminine ones. This is far removed from the English rhyme, Echo's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

poor relation, a genteel pauper whose attempts to shine result merely in doggerel garishness. For if in Russian and French, the feminine rhyme is a glamorous lady friend, her English counterpart is either an old maid or a drunken hussy from Limerick.

2. No matter the length of a word in Russian it has but one stress; there is never a secondary accent or two accents as occurs in English—especially American English.

3. Polysyllabic words are considerably more frequent than in English.

4. All syllables are fully pronounced; there are no elisions and slurs as there are in English verse.

5. Inversion, or more exactly pyrrhichization of trochaic words —so commonly met with in English iambics (especially in the case of two-syllable words ending in -er or -ing)—is rare in Russian verse: only a few two-syllable prepositions and the trochaic components of compound words lend themselves to shifts of stress.

6. Russian poems composed in iambic tetrameter contain a larger number of modulated lines than of regular ones, while the reverse is true in regard to English poems.

By "regular line" I mean an iambic line in which the metrical beat concides in each foot with the natural stress of the word: *Of cloudless climes and starry skies* (Byron). By "modulated line" I mean an iambic line in which at least one metrical accent falls on the unstressed syllable of a polysyllabic word (such as the third syllable in "reasonable") or on a monosyllabic word unstressed in speech (such as "of," "the," "and" etc.). In Russian prosody such modulations are termed "half-accents," and both in Russian and English poetry a tetrametric iambic line may have one such half-accent on the first, second, or third foot, or two half-accents in the first and third, or in adjacent feet. Here are some examples (the Roman figure designates the foot where the half-accent occurs).

I *Make the delighted spirit glow* (Shelley);
My apprehensions come in crowds (Wordsworth);
II *Of forests and enchantments drear* (Milton);
Beyond participation lie (Wordsworth);
III *Do paint the meadows with delight* (Shakespeare);
I know a reasonable woman (Pope);

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I+II *And on that unforgotten shore* (Bottomly);
II+III *When icicles hang by the wall* (Shakespeare);
I+III *Or in the chambers of the sea* (Blake);
An incommunicable sleep (Wordsworth).

It is important to mark that, probably in conjunction with, characteristic 3, the half-accent in the third foot occurs three or four times more frequently in Russian iambic tetrameters than in English ones, and that the regular line is more than twice rarer. If, for instance we examine Byron's *Mazeppa,* Scott's *The Lady of the Lake,* Keats's *The Eve of Saint Mark* and Tennyson's *In Memoriam,* we find that the percentage of regular lines there is around 65, as against only some 25 in *Onegin*. There is, however, one English poet whose modulations, if not as rich in quantity and variety as Pushkin's, are at least an approach to that richness. I refer to Andrew Marvell. It is instructive to compare Byron's snip-snap monotonies such as

One shade the more one ray the less
Had half impaired the nameless grace
Which waves in every raven tress
Or softly lightens o'er her face

with any of the lines addressed by Marvell "To His Coy Mistress":

And you should if you please refuse,
Till the conversion of the Jews
My vegetable love should grow
Vaster than empires and more slow,

—four lines in which there are six half-accents against Byron's single one.

It is among such melodies that one should seek one's model when translating Pushkin in verse.

III

I shall now make a statement for which I am ready to incur the wrath of Russian patriots: Alexandr Sergeyevich Pushkin (1799-1837), the national poet of Russia, was as much a product of French literature as of Russian culture; and what happened to be

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

added to this mixture, was individual genius which is neither Russian nor French, but universal and divine. In regard to Russian influence, Zhukovski and Batyushkov were the immediate predecessors of Pushkin: harmony and precision—this was what he learned from both, though even his boyish verses were more vivid and vigorous than those of his young teachers. Pushkin's French was as fluent as that of any highly cultured gentleman of his day. Gallicisms in various stages of assimilation populate his poetry with the gay hardiness of lucern and dandelion invading a trail in the Rocky Mountains. *Coeur flétri, essaim de désirs, transports, alarmes, attraits, attendrissement, fol amour, amer regret* are only a few—my list comprises about ninety expressions that Pushkin as well as his predecessors and contemporaries transposed from French into melodious Russian. Of special importance is *bizarre, bizarrerie* which Pushkin rendered as *strannïy, strannost'* when alluding to the oddity of Onegin's nature. The *douces chimères* of French elegies are as close to the *sladkie mechtï* and *sladostnïe mechtaniya* of Pushkin as they are to the "delicious reverie" and "sweet delusions" of eighteenth-century English poets. The *sombres bocages* are Pushkin's *sumrachnïe dubrovï* and Pope's "darksome groves." The English translator should also make up his mind how to render such significant nouns and their derivatives as *toska* (*angoisse*), *tomnost'* (*langueur*) and *nega* (*mollesse*) which constantly recur in Pushkin's idiom. I translate *toska* as "heart-ache" or "anguish" in the sense of Keats's "wakeful anguish." *Tomnost'* with its adjective *tomnïy* is among Pushkin's favorite words. The good translator will recall that "languish" is used as a noun by Elizabethan poets (e.g., Samuel Daniel's "relieve my languish"), and in this sense is to "anguish" what "pale" is to "dark." Blake's "her languished head" takes care of the adjective, and the "languid moon" of Keats is nicely duplicated by Pushkin's *tomnaya luna.* At some point *tomnost'* (languor) grades into *nega* (*molle langueur*), soft luxury of the senses, slumberous tenderness. Pushkin was acquainted with English poets only through their French models or French versions; the English translator of *Onegin,* while seeking an idiom in the Gallic diction of Pope and Byron, or in the romantic vocabulary of Keats, must constantly refer to the French poets.

In his early youth, Pushkin's literary taste was formed by the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

same writers and the same *Cours de Littérature* that formed Lamartine and Stendhal. This manual was the *"Lycée ou Cours de Littérature, ancienne et moderne"* by Jean François Laharpe, in sixteen volumes, 1799-1805. To the end of his days, Pushkin's favorite authors were Boileau, Bossuet, Corneille, Fénelon, Lafontaine, Molière, Pascal, Racine, and Voltaire. In relation to his contemporaries, he found Lamartine melodious but monotonous, Hugo gifted but on the whole second-rate; he welcomed the lascivious verse of young Musset, and rightly despised Béranger. In *Onegin* one finds echoes not only of Voltaire's *"Le Mondain"* (various passages in Chapter One) or Millevoye's *Elégies* (especially in passages related to Lenski), but also of Parny's *Poésies Erotiques,* Gresset's *Vert-vert,* Chénier's melancholy melodies and of a host of *petits poètes français,* such as Baïf, Gentil Bernard, Bernis, Bertin, Chaulieu, Colardeau, Delavigne, Delille, Desbordes-Valmore, Desportes, Dorat, Ducis, Gilbert, Lattaignant, Lebrun, Le Brun, Legouvé, Lemierre, Léonard, Malfilâtre, Piron, Jean-Baptiste Rousseau, and others.

As to German and English, he hardly had any. In 1821, translating Byron into gentleman's French for his own private use, he renders "the wave that rolls below the Athenian's grave" (beginning of the *Giaour*) as *"ce flot qui roule sur la grêve d'Athène."* He read Shakespeare in Guizot's and Amedée Pichot's revision of Letourneur's edition (Paris, 1821) and Byron in Pichot's and Eusèbe de Salle's versions (Paris, 1819-21). Byron's command of the cliché was singularly dear to Russian poets as echoing the minor and major French poetry on which they had been brought up.

It would have been a flat and dry business indeed, if the verbal texture of *Onegin* were reduced to these patterns in faded silks. But a miracle occurred. When, more than a hundred and fifty years ago, the Russian literary language underwent the prodigious impact of French, the Russian poets made certain inspired selections and matched the old and the new in certain enchantingly individual ways. French stock epithets, in their Russian metamorphosis, breathe and bloom anew, so delicately does Pushkin manipulate them as he disposes them at strategic points of his meaningful harmonies. Incidentally, this does not lighten our task.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

IV

The person who desires to turn a literary masterpiece into another language, has only one duty to perform, and this is to reproduce with absolute exactitude the whole text, and nothing but the text. The term "literal translation" is tautological since anything but that is not truly a translation but an imitation, an adaptation or a parody.

The problem, then, is a choice between rhyme and reason: can a translation while rendering with absolute fidelity the whole text, and nothing but the text, keep the form of the original, its rhythm and its rhyme? To the artist whom practice within the limits of one language, his own, has convinced that matter and manner are one, it comes as a shock to discover that a work of art can present itself to the would-be translator as split into form and content, and that the question of rendering one but not the other may arise at all. Actually what happens is still a monist's delight: shorn of its primary verbal existence, the original text will not be able to soar and to sing; but it can be very nicely dissected and mounted, and scientifically studied in all its organic details. So here is the sonnet, and there is the sonneteer's ardent admirer still hoping that by some miracle of ingenuity he will be able to render every shade and sheen of the original and somehow keep intact its special pattern in another tongue.

Let me state at once that in regard to mere meter there is not much trouble. The iambic measure is perfectly willing to be combined with literal accuracy for the curious reason that English prose lapses quite naturally into an iambic rhythm.

Stevenson has a delightful essay warning the student against the danger of transferring one's prose into blank verse by dint of polishing and pruning; and the beauty of the thing is that Stevenson's discussion of the rhythmic traps and pitfalls is couched in pure iambic verse with such precision and economy of diction that readers, or at least the simpler readers, are not aware of the didactic trick.

Newspapers use blank verse as commonly as Monsieur Jourdain used prose. I have just stretched my hand toward a prostrate paper, and reading at random I find

> *Debate on European Army interrupted: the Assembly's Foreign Affairs Committee by a vote*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Of twenty-four to twenty has decided
To recommend when the Assembly
Convenes this afternoon
That it adopt the resolution
To put off the debate indefinitely.
This, in effect, would kill the treaty.

The New York Yankees aren't conceding
The American League flag to Cleveland
But the first seed of doubt
Is growing in the minds of the defending champions.

Nebraska city proud of jail:
Stromsburg, Nebraska (Associated Press).
They're mighty proud here of the city jail,
A building that provides both for incarceration
And entertainment. The brick structure houses
The police station and the jail. The second story
Has open sides and is used as a band stand.

V

Onegin has been mistranslated into many languages. I have checked only the French and English versions, and some of the rhymed German ones. The three complete German concoctions I have seen are the worst of the lot. Of these Lippert's (1840) which changes Tatiana into Johanna, and Seubert's (1873) with its Max-und-Moritz tang, are beneath contempt; but Bodenstedt's fluffy product (1854) has been so much praised by German critics that it is necessary to warn the reader that it, too, despite a more laudable attempt at understanding if not expression, bristles with incredible blunders and ridiculous interpolations. Incidentally, at this point, it should be noted that Russians themselves are responsible for the two greatest insults that have been hurled at Pushkin's masterpiece—the vile Chaykovski (Tschaykowsky) opera and the equally vile illustrations by Repin which decorate most editions of the novel.

Onegin fared better in French—namely in Turgenev and Viardot's fairly exact prose version (in *La Revue Nationale*, Paris 1863). It would have been a really good translation had Viardot realized how much Pushkin relied on the Russian equivalent of the stock

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

epithets of French poetry, and had he acted accordingly. As it is, Dupont's prose version (1847), while crawling with errors of a textual nature, is more idiomatic.

There are four English complete versions unfortunately available to college students: *Eugene Onéguine,* translated by Lieut.-Col. Spalding (Macmillan, London 1881); *Eugene Onegin,* translated by Babette Deutsch in *The Works of Alexander Pushkin,* selected and edited by Abraham Yarmolinski (Random House, New York 1936); *Evgeny Onegin,* translated by Oliver Elton (*The Slavonic Revue,* London, Jan. 1936 to Jan. 1938, and The Pushkin Press, London 1937); *Eugene Onegin,* translated by Dorothea Prall Radin and George Z. Patrick (Univ. of California Press, Berkeley 1937).

All four are in meter and rhyme; all are the result of earnest effort and of an incredible amount of mental labor; all contain here and there little gems of ingenuity; and all are grotesque travesties of their model, rendered in dreadful verse, teeming with mistranslations. The least offender is the bluff, matter-of-fact Colonel; the worst is Professor Elton, who combines a kind of irresponsible verbal felicity with the most exuberant vulgarity and the funniest howlers.

One of the main troubles with would-be translators is their ignorance. Only by sheer unacquaintance with Russian life in the 'twenties of the last century can one explain, for instance, their persistently translating *derevnya* by "village" instead of "country-seat," and *skakat'* by "to gallop" instead of "to drive." Anyone who wishes to attempt a translation of Onegin should acquire exact information in regard to a number of relevant subjects, such as the Fables of Krïlov, Byron's works, French poets of the eighteenth century, Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse,* Pushkin's biography, banking games, Russian songs related to divination, Russian military ranks of the time as compared to Western European and American ones, the difference between cranberry and lingenberry, the rules of the English pistol duel as used in Russia, and the Russian language.

VI

To illustrate some of the special subtleties that Pushkin's translators should be aware of, I propose to analyze the opening quatrain of stanza XXXIX in Chapter Four, which describes On-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

egin's life in the summer of 1820 on his country estate situated some three hundred miles west of Moscow:

Progúlki, chtén'e, son glubókoy,
Lesnáya ten', zhurchán'e struy,
Poróy belyánki cherno-ókoy
Mladóy i svézhiy potzelúy . . .

In the first line,

progulki, chten'e, son glubokoy

(which Turgenev-Viardot translated correctly as *"la promenade, la lecture, un somneil profond et salutaire"*), *progulki* cannot be rendered by the obvious "walks" since the Russian term includes the additional idea of riding for exercise or pleasure. I did not care for "promenades" and settled for "rambles" since one can ramble about on horseback as well as on foot. The next word means "reading," and then comes a teaser: *glubokoy son* means not only "deep sleep" but also "sound sleep" (hence the double epithet in the French translation) and of course implies "sleep by night." One is tempted to use "slumber," which would nicely echo in another key the alliterations of the text (*progulki-glubokoy,* rambles-slumber), but of these elegancies the translator should beware. The most direct rendering of the line seems to be:

rambles, and reading, and sound sleep . . .[1]

In the next line

lesnaya ten', zhurchan'e struy . . .

lesnaya ten' is "the forest's shade," or, in better concord "the sylvan shade" (and I confess to have toyed with (Byron's) "the umbrage of the wood"); and now comes another difficulty: the catch in *zhurchan'e struy,* which I finally rendered as "the bubbling of the streams," is that *strui* (nominative plural) has two meanings: its ordinary one is the old sense of the English "streams" designating not bodies of water but rather limbs of water, the shafts of a running river (for example as used by Kyd in "Cornelia": "O beautious Tyber

1 Cp. Pope's "sound sleep by night, study and ease," in "Solitude," or James Thomson's "retirement, rural quiet, friendship, books," in "The Seasons: Spring."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with thine easie streams that glide . . .," or by Anne Bradstreet in "Contemplations": "a [River] where gliding streams" etc.), while the other meaning is an attempt on Pushkin's part to express the French "*ondes,*" waters; for it should be clear to Pushkin's translator that the line

the sylvan shade, the bubbling of the streams . . .

(or as an old English rhymster might have put it "the green-wood shade, the purling rillets") deliberately reflects an idyllic ideal dear to the Arcadian poets. The wood and the water, "*les ruisseaux et les bois,*" can be found together in countless "*éloges de la campagne*" praising the "green retreats" that were theoretically favored by eighteenth-century French and English poets. Antoine Bertin's "*le silence des bois, le murmure de l'onde*" (*Elégie XXII*) or Evariste Parny's "*dans l'épaisseur du bois, au doux bruit des ruisseaux*" (*Fragment d'Alcée*) are typical commonplaces of this kind.

With the assistance of these minor French poets, we have now translated the first two lines of the stanza. Its entire first quatrain runs:

Rambles, and reading, and sound sleep,
the sylvan shade, the bubbling of the streams;
sometimes a white-skinned dark-eyed girl's
young and fresh kiss.

Poroy belyanki cherno-okoy
Mladoy i svezhiy potzeluy

The translator is confronted here by something quite special. Pushkin masks an autobiographical allusion under the disguise of a literal translation from André Chénier, whom however he does not mention in any appended note. I am against stressing the human-interest angle in the discussion of literary works; and such emphasis would be especially incongruous in the case of Pushkin's novel where a stylized, and thus fantastic, Pushkin is one of the main characters.

However there is little doubt that our author camouflaged in the present stanza, by means of a device which in 1825 was unique in the annals of literary art, his own experience: namely a brief intrigue he was having that summer on his estate in the Province of Pskov with Olga Kalashnikov, a meek, delicate-looking slave girl,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

whom he made pregnant and eventually bundled away to a second demesne of his, in another province. If we now turn to André Chénier, we find, in a fragment dated 1789 and published by Latouche as "*Epitre VII, à de Pange ainé*" (lines 5-8):

> . . . Il a dans sa paisible et sainte solitude,
> Du loisir, due sommeil, et les bois, et l'étude,
> Le banquet des amis, et quelquefois, les soirs,
> Le baiser jeune et frais d'une blanche aux yeux noirs.

None of the translators of Pushkin, English, German or French, have noticed what several Russian students of Pushkin discovered independently (a discovery first published, I think, by Savchenko —"*Elegiya Lenskogo i frantzuskaya elegiya,*" in *Pushkin v mirovoy literature,* note, p. 362, Leningrad 1926), that the two first lines of our stanza XXXIX are a paraphrase, and the next two a metaphrase of Chénier's lines. Chénier's curious preoccupation with the whiteness of a woman's skin (see for example "*Elégie XXII*) and Pushkin's vision of his own frail young mistress, fuse to form a marvelous mask, the disguise of a personal emotion; for it will be noted that our author, who was generally rather careful about the identification of his sources, nowhere reveals his direct borrowing here, as if by referring to the literary origin of these lines he might impinge upon the mystery of his own romance.

English translators, who were completely unaware of all the implications and niceties I have discussed in connection with this stanza, have had a good deal of trouble with it. Spalding stresses the hygienic side of the event

> *the uncontaminated kiss*
> *of a young dark-eyed country maid;*

Miss Radin produces the dreadful:

> *a kiss at times from some fair maiden*
> *dark-eyed, with bright and youthful looks;*

Miss Deutsch, apparently not realizing that Pushkin is alluding to Onegin's carnal relations with his serf girls, comes up with the incredibly coy:

> *and if a black-eyed girl permitted*
> *sometimes a kiss as fresh as she;*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and Professor Elton, who in such cases can always be depended upon for grotesque triteness and bad grammar, reverses the act and peroxides the concubine:

at times a fresh young kiss bestowing
upon some blond and dark-eyed maid.

Pushkin's line is, by-the-by, an excellent illustration of what I mean by "literalism, literality, literal interpretation." I take literalism to mean "absolute accuracy." If such accuracy sometimes results in the strange allegoric scene suggested by the phrase "the letter has killed the spirit," only one reason can be imagined: there must have been something wrong either with the original letter or with the original spirit, and this is not really a translator's concern. Pushkin has literally (i.e. with absolute accuracy) rendered Chénier's *"une blanche"* by *"belyanka"* and the English translator should reincarnate here both Pushkin and Chénier. It would be false literalism to render *belyanka* (*une blanche*) as "a white one"—or, still worse, "a white female"; and it would be ambiguous to say "fair-faced." The accurate meaning is "a white-skinned female," certainly "young," hence a "white-skinned girl," with dark eyes and, presumably, dark hair enhancing by contrast the luminous fairness of unpigmented skin.

Another good example of a particularly "untranslatable" stanza is XXXIII in Chapter One:

I recollect the sea before a storm:
O how I envied
the waves that ran in turbulent succession
to lie down at her feet with love!

Ya pómnyu móre pred grozóyu:
kak ya zavídoval volnám
begúshchim búrnoy cheredóyu
s lyukóv'yu lech k eyó nogám!

Russian readers discern in the original here two sets of beautifully onomatopoeic alliterations: *begushchim burnoy* . . . which renders the turbulent rush of the surf, and *s lyubov'yu lech*—the liquid lisp of the waves dying in adoration at the lady's feet. Whomsoever the recollected feet belonged to (thirteen-year-old Marie Raevski paddling near Taganrog, or her father's godchild, a young *dame de com-*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pagnie of Tatar origin, or what is more likely—despite Marie's own memoirs—Countess Elise Vorontzov, Pushkin's mistress in Odessa, or, most likely, a retrospective combination of reflected ladies), the only relevant fact here is that these waves come from Lafontaine through Bogdanovich. I refer to *"L'onde pour toucher . . . [Vénus] à longs flots s'entrepousse et d'une égale ardeur chaque flot à son tour s'en vient baiser les pieds de la mère d'Amour* (Jean de la Fontaine, *"Les Amours de Psiche et de Cupidon,"* 1669) and to a close paraphrase of this by Ippolit Bogdanovich, in his "Sweet Psyche" (*Dushen'ka,* 1783-1799) which in English should read "the waves that pursue her jostle jealously to fall humbly at her feet."

Without introducing various changes, there is no possibility whatsoever to make of Pushkin's four lines an alternately-rhymed tetrametric quatrain in English, even if only masculine rhymes be used. The key words are: *collect, sea, storm, envied, waves, ran, turbulent, succession, lie, feet, love*; and to these eleven not a single addition can be made without betrayal. For instance, if we try to end the first line in "before"—*I recollect the sea before* (followed by a crude enjambement)—and graft the rhyme "shore" to the end of the third line (*the* something *waves that storm the shore*), this one concession would involve us in a number of other changes completely breaking up the original sense and all its literary associations. In other words, the translator should constantly bear in mind not only the essential pattern of the text but also the borrowings with which that pattern is interwoven. Nor can anything be added for the sake of rhyme or meter. One thinks of some of those task problems in chess tourneys to the composition of which special restrictive rules are applied, such as the stipulation that only certain pieces may be used. In the marvelous economy of an *Onegin* stanza, the usable pieces are likewise strictly limited in number and kind: they may be shifted around by the translator but no additional men may be used for padding or filling up the gaps that impair a unique solution.

VII

To translate an *Onegin* stanza does not mean to rig up fourteen lines with alternate beats and affix to them seven jingle rhymes starting with pleasure-love-leisure-dove. Granted that rhymes

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

can be found, they should be raised to the level of *Onegin's* harmonies but if the masculine ones may be made to take care of themselves, what shall we do about the feminine rhymes? When Pushkin rhymes *devï* (maidens) with *gde vï* (where are you?), the effect is evocative and euphonious, but when Byron rhymes "maidens" with "gay dens," the result is burlesque. Even such split rhymes in *Onegin* as the instrumental of Childe Harold and the instrumental of "ice" (*Garol'-dom—so-l'dom*), retain their aonian gravity and have nothing in common with such monstrosities in Byron as "new skin" and "Pouskin" (a distortion of the name of Count Musin-Pushkin, a binominal branch of the family).

So here are three conclusions I have arrived at: 1. It is impossible to translate *Onegin* in rhyme. 2. It is possible to describe in a series of footnotes the modulations and rhymes of the text as well as all its associations and other special features. 3. It is possible to translate *Onegin* with reasonable accuracy by substituting for the fourteen rhymed tetrameter lines of each stanza fourteen unrhymed lines of varying length, from iambic dimeter to iambic pentameter.

These conclusions can be generalized. I want translations with copious footnotes, footnotes reaching up like skyscrapers to the top of this or that page so as to leave only the gleam of one textual line between commentary and eternity. I want such footnotes and the absolutely literal sense, with no emasculation and no padding—I want such sense and such notes for all the poetry in other tongues that still languishes in "poetical" versions, begrimed and beslimed by rhyme. And when my *Onegin* is ready, it will either conform exactly to my vision or not appear at all.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BERLIN LETTER

THE CRISIS OF TRADITION IN GERMANY

Berlin, ten years after the end of the war and its blackest hour, is a reassuring example of how one can settle down, with a good measure of comfort, among the ruins of one's pride even in a frightened and precarious world. Even though it is still threatened by the surrounding Russians, it is holding on and managing to preserve itself in the delicate equilibrium of American and Russian power. The present calm has been accepted, though not without mixed feelings, if not actual regret. After the heroic era of the air lift, the June rebellion in East Berlin, and the constant clashes with the Russians, Berlin was suddenly off the front page of the world press, and the Berliner missed a certain glory and excitement in his daily life.

There is hard and quick work of rebuilding being done all over the western part of the city, and there are, literally, many flowers among the ruins. For West Berlin, with the subsidies it receives to keep its unemployed at least intermittently at work, takes great care of its parks and green patches. It has indeed the most beautiful and imaginative flower arrangements of any city I know.

In the present calm, the isolated Berliner tries hard to amuse himself with the material goods provided by the so-called "German economic miracle"; particularly with new cars, driven with the reckless and ferocious gaiety with which children handle a new toy. After twenty years of severe material shortages and of officially prescribed sacrifice the reversal is complete: the devotion to new cars, bikes, technical novelties, is as passionate as that of the American which only a few years ago had been scorned here as a symptom of a purely materialistic *Weltanschauung*. In this sense Germany has indeed entered a new philosophic era.

The spirit of this city-state is boisterous, skeptical, and of a curious optimistic pessimism. One is not shaken by the worst, because one always expects it and is prepared to make the best of it; there is even a certain satisfaction in the accurateness of the prognosis as well as pride in having braved past disasters. Berlin is also an internationally minded town: theaters, movies, bookstores offer a rich fare hardly surpassed anywhere.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Creatively, however, it is still going in low gear. Its only genuine achievement so far is in the field of the cabaret, this peculiarly continental *Gebrauchskunst*: the political *chanson,* the literary parody, the topical sketch, always favored here, found an ideal forum in this isolated town in which political life and strife affects everybody. Cabaret is night club entertainment with a message: sharp, witty, effective, nourished by the local brand of a grotesque and very earthy humor, it aims at the absurdities in the eastern as well as in the western part of this divided city (but always basically at the absurdities in *la condition humaine*).

So far as serious literature is concerned, Berlin still suffers from its isolation, the liquidation and dispersion of talent, and from that ubiquitous German problem: a frustrated revolution. The 'twenties, not so unlike the American 'twenties, were a time of much craziness, jolly and not so jolly, and also of enormous creative ferment. Berlin was at that time a center for the avant-garde and attracted talent not only from Germany but also from Central and Eastern Europe, a very considerable part of it Jewish. Altogether it was a vigorous attempt at creating a truly modern, urban literature, which, to be sure, perished partly from its own excess. The promising core in it was suppressed after 1933.

Finally, in 1955, only two big bronze gods, strange survivors from before the deluge, are still among us, both very much withdrawn from the general public as well as the literary crowd: Gottfried Benn and Berthold Brecht. Very appropriately one is in West and one in East Berlin. Both are still writing, although with somewhat blunted pens. Brecht is bridled by the Communist party line, doing his best work in theater productions in East Berlin, of which, however, no press or public notice is being taken in this western part of the city. Many of the superbly staged plays are flat propaganda pieces. Gottfried Benn, M.D., is almost seventy now, and still a practicing dermatologist. In the 'twenties and before he was the great shocker, who wrote with singular brutality, plus exact medical knowledge, about the putrefaction of the flesh. *Flesh* and *Morgue* were titles, and indeed the subjects, of two of his poetry collections. He is more mellow and resigned now, but can still use language and ideas with a fencer's sharpness and elegance. He is, after so many losses, the German poet with the finest ear for language, and, above all, the only one besides the earlier Brecht with a truly original, if controversial, vision. From the obsession about carnal decay he has moved to the promotion of cerebration: "Provoked Life" is the title of one of his very provoking essays, in which he advocates the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

planned stimulation of the mind. In another, "Pallas Athena," the clear-minded sexless goddess, who pardons the matricidal Orestes, becomes the symbol of a new phase in world history which rejects the warmth of the womb and embarks, by constant stimulation, on the daring construction of this dangerous artificer: mind. In other words, the old rebel Benn represents a new version of the traditional German preoccupation: the dichotomy of *"Natur"* and *"Geist."*

Otherwise Berlin's literary situation resembles its political predicament: it claims to be the capital but is only the hide-out of the very faithful and the very tenacious. The difficulties of distribution have driven out most of the larger publishers; only a few remain, together with the returned house of Ullstein. But the successful German writers are not attracted by Berlin's exciting position between two worlds; they prefer to live at more calm and scenic places, particularly around Lake Constance.

Too bad: Berlin's story cries to be written. Human problems are posed here with singular directness and nakedness. For better or worse, it is the unique place where the great political problems of our age inevitably take hold of the individual. Of everybody, not only of the intellectual who makes them his responsibility. In this city hubris, political crime or the toleration of crime was paid for by all the castigations of war and conquest; and perhaps because of this soul-clearing punishment, it emerged into the postwar world freer and saner than other parts of Germany: a capital into which victors marched with the joy of final triumph, only to find, three years later, that it was in their own best interest to feed and sustain every single soul in it. Along the borderline, which divides this city as it divides the world, treason, or the rejection of treason, is daily practiced—for ideals, for money, or because of intolerable pressure. And freedom actually is a value for which people every day leave all their possessions. What lessons in history and the anatomy of the human heart! Theodor Plievier, in the third volume of the trilogy which began with *Stalingrad,* tried to write some of this story, from the fall of Berlin to the rise of the workers of East Berlin in June 1953, but only managed to give a sketchy panorama, full of a rather annoying typicality. He failed, like so many other writers of documentary fiction. Berlin has not yet found its literary voice.

II

It is now fashionable, particularly in America, to explain the problems of a literary situation in terms of tradition or the lack of it.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Tradition there is so much evoked precisely because of its absence, or so it seems to the European; while in Europe it is a ruling force which because of its omnipresence is seldom discussed or even consciously felt. But at this point in German literature, which is clearly marked as a crisis in tradition, it might be well to remind oneself of its existence.

In American critical writing tradition figures as the most wanted item. In the same liberal definition it is longingly viewed as "a cultural base for the free rein of talent" (William Phillips), while the conservatives, who seem to be in the majority, see it as a firmly established order binding all minds to a supposedly beneficial uniformity of belief. In the course of their short history, Americans have moved from a wholesale rejection of tradition, regarded as the bearer of Old World evils, to a full acceptance of it; and this is taken as a remedy for all ailments. Both attitudes are, of course, unrealistic and determined by wishful thinking. In their often-proclaimed innocence, Americans seem to have no suspicion that the tradition which is to bring order to the literary mind might be anything but good; the tacit assumption is indeed that anything produced by time and tradition must be good. I take it that this is the persisting influence of T. S. Eliot's conception, who in a tricky tight-rope act between the European and the American idea of it (in his essay "Tradition and Individual Talent") defined tradition as something "which cannot be inherited" (which is surely the basic meaning of it). "If you want it, you must obtain it by great labor." He also suggested that everybody, particularly the poet, has to discover and select his own tradition and has to fit his work into it. Thus he created the notion of a voluntary cultural tradition by choice and adoption, depending on learning and self-discipline instead of automatic obedience: democratic (self-elected) as well as ascetic, and altogether ideal. I want to stress the ascetic element here, because it is always overlooked by those who lament the lack of tradition in American culture: tradition in that sense means the voluntary dedication to the hard work ("great labor") of education in world learning. But this is rejected in America both collectively, in the general school system, as well as individually by the American writer who regards the erudition of an Eliot, or a Thomas Mann, as a formidable but outmoded tool of writing for which he has no real hankering.

The chastised European of today knows that tradition is a burden as well as a blessing, and often of dubious quality. He is now closer than ever before to the position of the revolutionary-minded Americans of the eighteenth century who regarded all tradition as corrupted. I believe that this is one of the reasons, a neglected but powerful one, for

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the popularity of American literature in Europe today. It is not so much blood and violence as the tradition-freer style which fascinates European readers and writers, and paradoxically makes novels about the seamier side of American life symbols of an American advantage over Europe.

The German writer of today simply faces the fact that his tradition, namely the most recent link of the chain to which he has to join himself, is evil. This situation is more difficult to cope with than having a weak or fragmentary tradition. Ten years after the end of the war, it is more than anything else responsible for the present irresolution of German literature. The years from 1933 to 1945 loom darkly over the German writer's consciousness: impossible to ignore them as it is nearly impossible to deal with them.

On the lower level of the films it is easier. In this sphere efforts are being made to establish a new tradition by salvaging as many good elements as can be found in the muddy stream of the immediate past. In one of the better recent films, Canaris is presented as a tragic figure who always tried to prevent the worst. That might have been remarkable under the circumstances, but it is not quite enough to make him a symbol of the better Germany for which one searches. Two films about the 20th of July, the unsuccessful atempt to assassinate Hitler, also failed in this and other respects. But very successful are some recent films in which the heroism of war finds a reinterpretation in an un-military sense. One could consider this a belated, and now wholly undesired, effect of the Allied re-education program, but it is more likely the very natural reaction of a generation of ex-soldiers trying to make sense of its war experience. *Der Hauptmann und sein Held* (The Captain and His Hero) is a comedy about a fraudulently obtained medal which brings immunity and promotion to a harassed private, until finally at the end of the war he makes himself worthy of the medal by disobeying an order which would bring about the useless sacrifice of his battalion. His execution is prevented by a deus ex machina in the shape of a tall American Negro soldier who collects medals because he needs them as souvenirs for his two kids. Or the four-episode film *Heldentum nach Ladenschluss* (Heroes after Closing Time) which poses the Odyssean situation for the German soldier after defeat. Bravery and ruse are used to escape captivity and get home to civilian life. There is the final triumph of the poor ragged soldier outwitting the victors, who, however, are presented as human and sympathetic figures. This is a supremely satisfying victory on the screen: as the harmless but ingenious fool, the defeated soldier, fools the victors, thereby delighting and re-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

deeming his audience and himself. (It is not without irony that at this point America is sending us such films as *Strategic Air Command,* which was a spectacular flop at this year's Berlin film festival, or the *Long Gray Line,* which fell through as an insipid glorification of militarism.)

All this is at a time when the debate on remilitarization rages all over Western Germany. At this appropriate moment appeared the film *08/15,* the biggest success of all, which satirizes the pre-war barrack life and the sadistic training practices of the late German army. The film is based on a slick novel, which is undoubtedly influenced by James Jones's *From Here to Eternity,* without coming anywhere near its power and sincerity. And here again, the past has cast an evil eye. The author, H. H. Kirst, was discovered to have been not a Private Prew, who suffered from the sadism of his military superiors, but a vigorous Nazi officer, who is on record for his fanatic resistance at the end of the war. Could this be a case of a real conversion? The superficiality of book and film makes it doubtful. To be a good artist today in Germany is also a test of character.

But what can serious literature do in this crisis of tradition? Purge itself and make a new start. This is, on the whole, a matter of generations. Thomas Mann's *Dr. Faustus* set an early example for the first possibility, although it is not so much a cathartic work as one of subtle analysis. If Mann's position was somewhat outside and above German postwar existence, he nevertheless exerted an immense influence in matters of style, technique and subject matter, much more than his detractors want to admit. He embodied, after all, the best of living German literary tradition. His *Krull,* published as the first of two projected volumes, was the bestseller of the year. But the completed book is a let-down from the earlier fragment; the later adventures of the impostor-genius Krull are, as some critics have pointed out, overwritten, facile and casual. The second greatest success of the year among the serious novels is a book absolutely in the Mann tradition, a novel called *Stiller* (a name) by the Austrian-Swiss Max Frisch. It is the slowly revealed story of a man who, upon returning to his native Switzerland under an assumed name, is arrested by the police, who try to establish his identity with a man who escaped from various involvements some years back. Frisch is heavily indebted to Mann in the ironic representation of his material, and his hero Stiller, although less naively corrupt than Krull, basically poses the same question of bourgeois or public identity versus privately human identity. It is interesting to see that the search for

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

identity, for the real human being behind the appearance, is also the theme of a new novel by the prolific young Walter Jens, a professor from Tuebingen, who recounts the life of a writer and scholar who commits suicide because he refuses to become old (*Der Mann, der nicht alt werden wollte*).

The other, more obviously cathartic theme dominant in recent German literature is that of guilt. Several novels on this theme by writers of the older generation have recently appeared; and while they are reputable and competent, none has had the strong impact one would like to feel. Alexander Lernet-Holenia's *Der Graf Luna* (Count Luna) is an interesting study in the psychology of guilt.

Edzard Schaper writes with a soul-searching, religious intensity (he is a Catholic convert); he is one of the most accomplished German novelists of our time. The title figure of his new novel *Der Gouverneur* (The Governor) is the Swedish governor of Estonia at the time of Charles XII. After the Russian victory of Poltava he prepares for return to Sweden when it becomes his duty to pronounce judgment on a young Swedish officer accused of a war crime. On the disorderly retreat from Poltava, the young Count Cronstedt had fallen in with a band of marauders who murdered the family of an Estonian nobleman. Only one daughter escapes, and Cronstedt is found wounded and numbed at the place of the slaughter. His trial is complicated by political factionalism, but in the course of the investigations it turns out that he did not really take part in the crime, in fact was injured when he tried to protect the surviving daughter. The governor realizes after many scruples and deliberations that formal justice is misapplied here. It is the girl's love and the grace of God, administered by the Lutheran Swedish chaplain, which redeem the sinner.

This novel is polished, thoughtful, sincere in its own deeply religious way, and written in the best tradition of the German quasi-philosophical novel. But it is perhaps just on this account that it falls short of its task. Schaper takes up one of the most serious problems of our time, and of life generally, a case of guilt in war, only to reveal it, reluctantly and almost furtively, to be a case of mistaken innocence. Everybody is really very noble in this novel.

But it is perhaps unjust to demand from Schaper, who is around sixty and chose to set his story in the eighteenth century, the cathartic book about the immediate past and the experience of war. Such a book, however, is eagerly awaited. A few months ago, there appeared in a large, inexpensive edition the diaries of a young writer and war historian, missing since the battle around Berlin in 1945: Felix Hartlaub's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Im Sperrkreis. Hartlaub might well have been the man to write the German novel about the war. The diary which was obviously kept for later literary utilization contains impressions and sketches from various theaters of war, although not from actual combat. We are inclined to say that here was the sharpest eye and richest gift for language in the younger generation. Toward the end of the war, Hartlaub as a historian was assigned to Hitler's headquarters (this is what the title of the book refers to), and from there we get the most fascinating of the notes; the frozen calm around the center of the storm is superbly sketched. But in spite of their superb writing qualities, these notes are only the raw material of a book which ought to have been written. Morally and aesthetically they are still in limbo, and in their transmitted form lack the clarification of a point of view.

A better book is Gert Ledig's first novel *Stalinorgel.* Together with the copyright notice it bears a note saying that the author refuses to use his war experience for commercial purposes and has ceded his royalties to an orphanage. This is a noble attitude and it implies a cathartic intention. But at the same time it indicates that the author is not primarily thinking of himself as a writer, and we assume that, unlike Hartlaub, he was not jotting down his notes when the war was still on. Nevertheless he has written a powerful small book, the best German war account yet. The novel relates two days of fighting on both the German and the Russian side of the Leningrad front, the futile slaughter on either side and the lonely, absolute desolation of the individual soldier. It is in an undogmatic way an existentialist book of the war. The book reminds one of the scouting expedition in Mailer's *Naked and the Dead,* and like much other German war writing, it is probably vaguely modeled after Mailer, who had, and still has, a tremendous influence here. But Ledig does not have Mailer's political anger, and draws no political implications except that war is abysmal.

The writer of war experience has it easier than the writer of post-war involvement. War is tremendous, shattering, destructive; any episode from it will do to prove this; and hardly anyone now poses questions about its origins, end, or implications.

But who has really managed to write about the complexities of German postwar existence? Best of all, I would say, the young Heinrich Böll, who writes with originality and unsentimental humanity about aftermath and transition. Some of his novels have already appeared in America, and his latest book *Haus ohne Hueter* (House Without Keepers) shows again greater literary maturity. This novel is precisely about the central German problem: how one lives at the breaking point

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of tradition. Two young war widows have to bring up their sons in a small town of postwar Germany. There are the "uncles," and a community of friends, relations, old foes, new converts to democratic life, who have also survived and try with more or less honesty to make a new life between the old and the new. The boys, eleven years of age, are just a bit older than this new German state and existence, and the book is mainly written from their point of view. There is the whole furor and the brief but acute tragedies of that age when they experience the usual sexual and moral quandaries among the entanglements of their elders.

This novel, which appeared this year, is perhaps an indication that a clearer perspective of the past and the present is now at hand; that a new tradition, in the sense of a cultural base for the free rein of talent, is about to be established.

Ursula Brumm

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ART CHRONICLE

THE NEW DECADE

For the first time since the painters around Robert Henri formed themselves into a group, called "The Eight," American art has had in the Abstract Expressionist painting of the last ten years a movement characterized by artistic coherence and widespread influence. The impression made by this movement has been the more emphatic because of an absence of significant movements in the forty years which separate "The Eight" from the dazzling adventure of the postwar years. There were important American artists in this period—particularly Dove, Marin, Benn, and Hartley—but they were made to work in a milieu so isolated that their importance is even now badly understood. In this period the only movement, so-called, was the aborted social realism of the 'thirties, whose dubious legacy to a later generation consists exclusively of a retrograde taste from which certain museum officials and collectors have been unable to shake loose.

This absence of movements has been an important, if negative, factor in the proliferation of Abstract Expressionist influence, for the capacious energy it has displayed in dominating the artistic culture of the last decade has been in direct proportion to the void it was invited to fill; and only a full-fledged movement, animated by audacious talents and what seem like far-reaching ideas, striving toward common goals, could hope to build the momentum which the situation called for.

This momentum could be traced to another source as well: to the belief that the artistic coherence of Abstract Expressionism derived from a radical impulse. For this reason alone it could scarcely avoid making a profound mark on the public sensibility, for the fact is that the cultural life of the last decade has not been distinguished by an adherence to radical ideas, and any artistic movement which appeared to embody a radical spirit was bound to ignite that smoldering nostalgia for the *avant garde* which everywhere characterizes the artistic life of the West today.

There is a sense in which this radicalism has been authentic, for it has extended easel painting to the brink of dissolution; but like many forms of American radicalism, it has also been provincial. This was true of "The Eight," and it is also true of the Abstract Expressionists.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The war which "The Eight" waged against academic art in the first decades of this century was ultimately placed in the service of an anecdotal style impoverished by an illustrational impulse which diverted its formal energies toward insignificant goals. The motive which inspired it, however, the effort to confront the false aestheticism of the academy with an art drawn from the raw materials of American urban experience, was genuinely radical in its intention. Yet the provincial limits of this radicalism were inadvertently betrayed by the group itself through its responsibility in organizing the Armory Show of 1913, which released upon the American scene the post-Impressionist, Parisian, and German art whose formal ideas superseded the local radicalism of "The Eight." Significantly, only the most peripheral member of this group, Maurice Prendergast, produced an art which could hold its own in the company of these Europeans. When the Museum of Modern Art showed his *Acadia* last year in the company of Vuillard and Bonnard, it showed a strength which none of his contemporaries could have summoned for the occasion. For the others, the Armory Show was cruel in its irony: what began as an effort to justify their radicalism ended with conclusive proof of their provincialism.

The two recent exhibitions called "The New Decade"—consisting of thirty-five Americans at the Whitney Museum and twenty-two Europeans at the Museum of Modern Art—had an irony of another kind, though it too had its cruel side. The intention of both exhibitions was to report on the achievements of the last ten years, but one could not miss the expectation, aroused by the announcement of the shows, that American art was at last to be vindicated; that The New Decade would be, in fact, The American Decade.

The Whitney Museum could be counted on, of course, to defeat this expectation in its own special way: by crowding its galleries with a parade of pseudo-talents (magic realists, neo-constructivists, *et al.*) to confuse the whole affair. If this fiasco has issued out of a genuine desire to single out the best pictures and sculptures of the decade, one could not quarrel with the intention. But it is all too clear that the real intention was merely the usual bureaucratic one of representing some imaginary cross-section of artistic endeavor, and the result was a typical Whitney performance. For every occasion when it goes out on a limb, there is always a pile of soft rubbish to cushion the fall.

Yet even if the Whitney had been more concerned to document the Abstract Expressionist movement, by including works by Hans Hofmann, Philip Guston, Clyfford Still, Mark Rothko, and the last paintings of Arshile Gorky—all of whom were missing from the American show—I think the exhibition would have been no less of a defeat for the expec-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tation I have mentioned, though at least it would have implemented the historical idea on which it is based. I have spoken of the irony which this exhibition reveals, and it consists in this: that the provincialism of the last decade, unlike the art of "The Eight," is threatened by no major artist from abroad, and therefore its claim to vitality, its very large claim to being the most advanced art of the West, will go uncontested by default.

This lack of first-class painting and sculpture from Europe suddenly deprives American art of a necessary term in the dialectical game it has always played with European achievements. Certainly there was little in the exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art to provoke the kind of response which American artists could once feel toward each new installment of the modern movement in Europe.

Of the artists in this European exhibition, the most emphatic personalities were those of Jean Dubuffet, Francis Bacon, and Alberto Burri. Dubuffet is probably the most extreme case of a meager talent undergoing a public inflation because of the breakdown of recent French painting. He is at his best in a picture like *The Tramp,* in which a distinctly articulated form, a silhouette of a figure, is forthrightly placed onto the center of the canvas. But even here he is not a painter who is very interesting for very long; his color is neither subtle nor intense, and his small store of formal ideas, heavily indebted to the art of children and other kinds of unprofessional drawing, exhausts itself in a very short time. Dubuffet's other pictures, works like *The Busy Life* and *Building Façades,* are executed in a manner which is above all polemical, and the object against which this polemic is directed is the solidity and elegance of the great French tradition—French, that is, insofar as it has manifested itself during the last century in France, but which is, in my view, only the most recent chapter in the main tradition of Western painting, the tradition of Rembrandt, Hals, El Greco, Velasquez, and Manet, and of which Cézanne was the last major representative to fulfill himself without equivocation. The materials of Dubuffet's polemic are rather threadbare—a muddy, scratchy surface, an infantile sense of linear form, and a deliberate ambition to produce "unsuccessful" pictures. The interest these pictures elicit is no longer an interest in specific works of art. Their polemical mode excites feelings of curiosity, indignation, or enthusiasm for a "way out" of the past; but all the same, the interest tends to reside in a cumulative development; the integrity and singularity of the work of art is no longer paramount, for in the polemical mode the work of art is simply a passing chapter in the drama of the artist's encounter with history.

Yet the imperatives behind Dubuffet's polemic become all the more

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

comprehensible when placed beside the paintings of the English artist Francis Bacon. Unlike his French contemporary, Bacon aspires to the grand style, and knowing that he does not yet have the means to pursue this aspiration frontally—for he is nothing if not knowledgable—he chooses to cast his work in the mode of parody. Bacon is not the first to do this, of course. There is the pervasive example of Picasso, who has ransacked and parodied practically the whole *musée imaginaire* of world art, sometimes with wit, sometimes with ferocity, but nearly always with a capacity for formal synthesis which is high on the list of his most fecund achievements. It is exactly this failure to retrieve a new formal synthesis from his paradoxical dealings with the grand style which condemns Bacon's art to mere slickness. I think this comes out most nakedly in the portrait studies "after" Velasquez' *Portrait of Pope Innocent X,* for all their agile brushwork and stunning color. Although he works out of a different milieu, Bacon shares the fate of a talent like Matta: a talent which is audacious and even brilliant in technique and ideas but which is basically superficial and "literary." Neither of them constructs his vision straightway with the brush, and their virtuosity is actually a subterfuge for concealing an inability to work through the problem of a contemporary style from its beginnings.

The method of Alberto Burri is more "contemporary" than Bacon's and more "American" than Dubuffet's. There is a sense in which Burri's collages (for he is not a painter) really ought to be considered part of the American exhibition, and not European at all. They may well be symptomatic of the terrible impasse which modern Italian art is struggling to traverse, an impasse induced by the humiliating years of Fascism; but they are more importantly an evidence of the inflationary results which the Abstract Expressionist movement has had in establishing the taste of the last decade.

Burri has created a collage style made up largely of sewing pieces of burlap on canvases decorated with flat areas of red, white or black paint. (He was originally a physician, and is said to have begun these grubby *objets d'art* in 1944 while a prisoner of war in Texas.) The result is a collage which makes the most of textural sensations, frequently tearing holes in the materials and adding thread, glue, and other substances as the quest for more and more unlikely surface details advances.

I have said that Burri is among the most emphatic personalities in the European exhibition, but there are times when he seems almost a figment out of the imagination of the last decade, for the present status (if not the genesis) of these collages issues entirely out of the special proclivities of this period. Collage has come forward to occupy the atten-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tion of painters as the manipulation of flat shapes of color has replaced the delineation of illusionistic forms as the central impulse in painting. This change has coincided with the postwar revival of the old, and rather stale, anti-art tactics of Dadaism; and the result has been a concentration on deliberately ugly, coarse, "unartistic" materials which repudiate any connection with received ideas on beautiful surfaces and elegant forms. Moreover, it is easier to effect these results in collage than with paint, if only because the pigment itself offers some resistance to this abuse. And it hardly needs saying that because pigment itself is now frequently abandoned altogether by certain "artists"—thus removing what remains the hardest task in the plastic arts: the application of paint to canvas—the door has been opened to a gang of pseudo-talents who in a less decadent period would be more profitably engaged in decorating department store windows. Burri is only the most widely hailed representative of this decadence, who at the same time demonstrates the sad fate of an "innocent" European beguiled by American cant (Karel Appel is another instance)—a curious cultural twist which we can expect to see more of in the years ahead.

The painters who emerge from the European exhibition with the best work are Afro, Edouard Pignon, and William Scott. It cannot be said of these artists that their work "extends" the means of painting, yet because they have concentrated on creating pictures which go as far as their talents can take them (and no further), they bring a modesty to easel art which is rare on both sides of the Atlantic today. Afro's *Boy with Turkey,* with its hot, transparent color (which he sustained in several brilliant pictures shown at the Viviano Gallery last spring), establishes this Italian as the most lyrical painter in the European show. And Pignon's two beautiful canvases, *Olive Tree at Sunset* and *Black Nude,* are the only evidence (albeit dilute) of what were once the glories of French art. Scott's paintings have less authority; they are on less intimate terms with the felicities of Parisian art than Pignon's, and there was no work as fully realized as the painting he showed in the Guggenheim Museum's "Younger European" exhibition; but he is nonetheless an authentic artist, working out his encounter with Continental painting without subterfuge or bravado.

What separates even the most successful paintings in the American exhibition (which I believe to have been painted by Willem de Kooning and Robert Motherwell) from the works of Pignon, say, is a quality which I should call *synthetic.* In the late 'forties and early 'fifties de Kooning produced a series of black and white pictures which are among

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the most distinguished work of the two decades. Two of these were in the Whitney show, *Dark Pond* (1948) and *Attic* (1950), and the best of them that I have seen is the black *Painting* (1948) in the Museum of Modern Art's permanent collection. These paintings are solidly constructed; everything on the surface is mobilized in the depiction of forms, including the so-called "dripping" which has never played a major role in de Kooning's style. There is no residue of gratuitous gesturing.

The source of these paintings has been the vocabulary of forms which Picasso's great synthesis has placed at the disposal of all the artists of our time. This may well be the essence of Picasso's role in modern art: to have shored up these fragments against the final debacle of easel art. De Kooning's work thus comes to us, as it were, off the top of Picasso's head, and therefore like Abstract Expressionist painting as a whole, it lives off the formal capital of the post-Impressionist and School of Paris art which make it possible.

Precisely what this can mean for an artist of de Kooning's seriousness has been dramatized by his recent paintings on the theme of *Woman*. These, too, represent a draft on Picasso's capital; but a struggle for a more monumental vision also asserts itself in these pictures, a struggle so naked in its earnestness and ambition that the paintings are frequently painful to look at. I think this "pain" ultimately derives from their failure—and it has been de Kooning's misfortune to come into his greatest publicity at the moment when his art is most problematic. The synthetic base from which he operates is so ubiquitous that even the re-introduction of the human figure has had to be made in Picasso's idiom. De Kooning is making the most interesting attempt today to transform this synthetic idiom into a style which is more heroic, more visionary, and more solidly constructed than it has been in the last decade, but he is a little like Sisyphus in Hades: the more strength he puts behind each thrust of the stone, the more crashing is each defeat. He is attempting nothing less (to paraphrase Cézanne) than to make something solid out of Abstract Expressionism, and it remains to be seen whether it can be done.[1]

1 The showing of de Kooning's recent picture, *Composition* (1955), at the Guggenheim Museum in September makes one skeptical that anything solid can come out of his efforts in the Abstract Expressionist style. It is a dismal performance, having more in common with the artist's imitators than with the work he produced himself in the late 'forties. Its presence in the Guggenheim is curious: were it to be exhibited in the more historically minded Modern, one might suppose its exhibition could be justified on grounds of representing the artist at a critical moment in his development; but at the Guggenheim, where the emphasis has been on the quality of specific works, its display is baffling.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This solidity has also been the intermittent quest of Motherwell's art, but where he has been closest to attaining it in a picture like *The Voyage* of 1949, he has done so at the sacrifice of complexity. His most coherent works never stray very far from a flat-patterning in black-white-ochre; beyond that limit, he is forced to deal in Picasso's currency, and so far his losses have been heavy.

If I have omitted thus far any discussion of sculpture from these pages, it is not only because the best sculpture of The New Decade is really isolated from the painting with which it is frequently exhibited, actually forming another subject for criticism, but also because there was very little sculpture in "The New Decade" exhibitions in which one could take a serious critical interest. With the Whitney's incredible omission of David Smith from the American show, the most impressive sculptor of the decade was missing, and there was no other figure (or group of figures) to replace him in authority and performance.

The problem of contemporary sculpture is a problem in freedom. There have been major sculptors in our time; Brancusi, Picasso, Matisse, Gonzalez, Giacometti, Lipschitz, Moore, and others have all created a body of work which enlarges the possibility of sculptural art, and in consequence they have been properly respected and imitated. But unlike the painters of the School of Paris, say, or the German Expressionists, or the group which formed the De Stijl movement, these sculptors do not represent a coherent artistic idea; they impose, in fact, a terrible anarchy on their younger contemporaries, and it is this anarchy which reigns now in baffling profusion.

Moreover, this anarchy of possibilities is abetted by a diversity of materials. As Otis Gage wrote last winter in *Arts & Architecture,*

> The variety of contemporary sculpture is in direct proportion to the variety of means and materials available to the sculptor. And they are available to a fantastic degree. A sculptor in New York can get almost any material that has ever been used for sculpture, and a few that have never been. . . . It should not be surprising if the present breadth of possibility has produced a certain shallowness of result. Sculptors have plunged into extreme techniques in a headlong flight from each other . . . or in search of their own characters. . . . It is only natural that the depth that would otherwise come out of group activity has been achieved by those artists who have been pursuing their particular course for the longest period of time.

David Smith's course has been welded metal, and he has made out of it a virile art which has more variety and scope than any sculpture shown in either of "The New Decade" exhibitions. I think he has accomplished

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

this by a certain cruelty in his forms, as if he felt compelled to objectify the agony of the task; but it is an art also marked by considerable wit and fantastic inventiveness—fantastic in the literal sense of proliferating fantasies in the form of sculptural ideas.

Of the European sculpture, Lynn Chadwick's *Inner Eye* was the only piece to invite comparison with Smith; it was an amazing *tour de force* in iron and glass, yet when its sheer physical bulk had been assimilated on several viewings, it showed a disconcerting tendency to look like Greenwich Village jewelry. Minguzzi's *Acrobat on Trapeze,* in bronze, was a more substantial work, and its complexities are of a kind which last. Mirko's archaic-looking *Chimera* was another solid piece, though it looked more like a bronze relic from an ancient Eastern civilization than anything created in 1955.

In the Whitney group, the only American who escaped the "shallowness" Mr. Gage mentions is Ibram Lassaw, whose "space sculpture" is one of the few authentic statements of the decade. I am dubious about whether this style can develop beyond its present quasi-decorative phase; paradoxically, it would require an architectural milieu in order to deliver itself from the fate of becoming mere *objets.* But even its sheer decorative power is impressive next to the trivialities of an artist like Richard Lippold, whose presence in our museums is another measure of the anarchy of values which surrounds sculpture today.

It is here that the problems of painting and sculpture meet. Because there is still in this country no native artistic culture to support the individual talent, our artists are made to function in a frantic, lonely arena in which they are prey to an anomalous sense of historical anxiety. There has been a desperate attempt in the last decade, particularly in America, to produce an historically important art, and this desperation enters into every phase of the artist's work and career: the museums are busy naming trends, and artists are anxious to "fit" into them (otherwise, who will buy their pictures?). The artist knows that his own personal history, too, must now be marked by discernible shifts and "periods"—it is not uncommon to hear painters under thirty refer, without a trace of irony, to their early, middle, and late works. And criticism is not guiltless in this matter.[2]

The responsibility for at least part of this development can be traced

2 Mr. Clement Greenberg's article on "'American-Type' Painting" (*PR,* Spring, 1955) is an interesting case in point. In a discussion of de Kooning, Hofmann, Gottlieb, Motherwell, Pollock, Tobey, Kline, Still, Newman, and Rothko, he found it unnecessary to name a single specific picture, which was all the more curious in view of his parting comment that "there is just the good and the bad, the realized and the unrealized."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

directly to the Museum of Modern Art, which has educated a whole generation to look upon art in the historical mode. But there has been a more far-reaching cause, too. The historicism of Marxist ideology in the 'thirties had a more profound influence on our cultural affairs than is usually admitted, and it could not be expected to evaporate with a mere change in political commitments. My own feeling is that this historicism has played an important underground role in artistic culture here, and particularly in the way the middle-aged generation has come to regard itself. The Museum of Modern Art has merely given the younger generation a more respectable version of the idea.

This historical anxiety, which is also a form of vanity, has managed to congeal the provincialism of The New Decade. The pendulum has now swung its full arc since the days of "The Eight." Where the latter found itself superseded by European art, The New Decade finds itself heir to a synthetic fortune; yet the fact remains that our lack of native values in art provides us with no medium for resisting the temptations of history.

I think a group of paintings, drawings, and sculptures more impressive than "The New Decade" exhibitions could have been assembled, however, just out of the shows held last season by some of the younger artists in New York, artists who are not immune to the historical vanity I have mentioned but who are nonetheless producing work which affords a pleasure and interest which Abstract Expressionist art seldom achieves. I would name particularly the painters Reginald Pollack, Nell Blaine, Philip Pearlstein, Wolf Kahn, and Leland Bell; sculptors Richard Stankiewicz and Fred Farr; and for their drawings, Knox Martin, Vincent Longo, and Joseph Glasco.[3] Nearly all of these artists admit once again the figurative motif, and thereby have given themselves access to a world of forms which do not lend themselves so easily to synthetic dissolution. For the painters the work has been made more difficult by The New Decade, for the task of working from nature—however remote the distance—is a dialectical process, and the *painting* term in the dialectic has been left in very bad repair.

What one would particularly hope to see from these new artists is a tolerance for levels of excellence which are without historical imperatives. It is what our artistic culture requires today above all—even more, I daresay, than a single "major" painter to hold up to those stubborn European critics.

Hilton Kramer

3 Glasco would have made a better showing at the Whitney if he had been represented by drawings and sculpture instead of paintings.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Walter Kaufmann

TOYNBEE AND SUPER-HISTORY

Judged by low standards, *A Study of History* is an impressive and often interesting work. Judged by the standards which color Toynbee's judgment and have molded his performance, it is supercolossal: a cast of thousands, ranging from churches and civilizations to the author and his family; ten volumes[1] compared to Spengler's two; and forty-eight pages of "Contents," no more analytic than the text but mystifying and titillating. Here is, as it were, a screen larger than Cinemascope, and above all entertainment coupled with religious significance and based on lots of research. This research, to be sure, does not preclude amazing oversights and errors, but the author is not writing for the historians who have by now roundly condemned his work.[2]

For whom does he write? He writes for posterity, for generations centuries hence who will read him after all the other writers of our time have long been forgotten. Again and again he takes posterity into his confidence with words like these: "As for the writer's use of the traditional language . . . he might say, for his readers' information, that his regular and deliberate practice was to continue to employ traditional language unless and until he could find new words that seemed to him to express his meaning more clearly and more exactly. In the writer's day the resources of language were still utterly inadequate" (VII, 421). But can the inadequacies of Toynbee's style really be blamed on "the writer's day"?

Sir Ernest Barker judges that Toynbee "writes English almost as if it were a foreign language, in long periodic sentences, with one relative clause piled on, or dovetailed into, another"; and he adds: "The

1 Vols. I-III, first published in 1934; IV-VI in 1939; and VII-X in 1954, all by Oxford University Press. Price for vols. VII-X: $35.00. Vol. XI, still to be published, will contain maps and a gazetteer, and vol. XII " 'reconsiderations' (*retractationes* in Saint Augustine's usage of the Latin word)."

2 Pieter Geyl in *Journal of the History of Ideas,* January 1948 and April 1955; A.J.P. Taylor in *The New Statesman,* Oct. 16, 1954; Sir Ernest Barker in *International Affairs,* January 1955; and *The Times Literary Supplement,* Oct. 22, 1954, among others.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

reviewer found himself tempted, again and again, to break up and rewrite the long rolling cryptic sentences: in particular he found himself anxious to banish . . . the 'ornate alias,' and to substitute, for instance, the words 'St. Paul' for 'the Tarsian Jewish apostle of Christianity *in partibus infidelium.*'" And A. J. P. Taylor, the Oxford historian, remarks that "adjectives are piled on with all the ruthlessness which the Egyptians used when building the pyramids."

If we considered Toynbee as in the main a poet, such criticisms of his style would certainly be pertinent; but is he not really a historian? The enormous difficulty of doing justice to Toynbee is due to his determination to mix genres. If you find fault with him as a historian you are likely to be told that he is really a social scientist who is a pioneer in a new field and out to discover hitherto unknown laws; and it is only when his method has been shown to be a travesty of science that apologists are apt to say he is a poet.

Today "integration" is popular, and its many spokesmen in our colleges sometimes overlook, as does Toynbee, that there is no special virtue whatever in a fusion of fanciful history with unsound science and poor poetry, even if it is spiced with ever so frequent references to God. The fallacy here is exactly the same which leads some people to suppose that five invalid proofs of God's existence are better than one valid proof. The answer to this infatuation with quantity has been given long ago in one of Aesop's fables: when a vixen boasted of the size of her litter and asked the lioness about the size of hers, the lioness replied: *hen alla leonta*—one, but a lion.

Let us then consider Toynbee first as a historian. I shall give two examples of his inadequacy, which could be multiplied at random; both are selected to obviate the objection that I am merely pitting my view against his or dealing with abstruse and remote incidents about which it is easy to make some small mistake. In both cases the author is dealing with material that is well known to millions of his contemporaries; and both demonstrate that he lacks the conscience of the sound historian.

Example 1: Part X deals with "Contacts between Civilizations in Time" and is subtitled "Renaissances." On the first five pages we are told, with a wealth of metaphor, analogy, and simple repetition, that "in using the word *renaissance* as a proper name, we have been allowing ourselves to fall into the error of seeing a unique occurrence in an event which in reality was no more than one particular instance of a recurrent historical phenomenon. The evocation of a dead culture by the living representatives of a civilization that is still a going concern proves

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to be a species of historical event for which the proper label is, not 'the Renaissance,' but 'renaissances.'" There follows "A Survey of Renaissances" in which these turn out to be a particularly repulsive form of necromancy—a word that is used scores of times, together with the metaphors which it invites. After Toynbee's indictment has taken up "Renaissances of Political Ideas, Ideals, and Institutions"; "Renaissances of Systems of Law"; "Renaissances of Philosophies" (five and a half pages on China and two and a half on Aristotle); and "Renaissances of Languages and Literatures" we finally do get to "Renaissances of Visual Arts" and *our* Renaissance. At this point I wonder how Toynbee will make good his indictment. You want to see what Toynbee will have to say about Leonardo, Michelangelo, Titian, and a dozen others. But he can't quite spare five pages for "Renaissances of Visual Arts"; and though he indicts the Italian Renaissance, he simply does not mention Leonardo, Michelangelo, Titian, or the other great painters and sculptors of the period.

I should not dream of challenging Toynbee's right to dislike these artists and should certainly find an intelligent critique much more to my liking than a conventional appreciation. As it happens, Toynbee is not at all interested in them, and in his whole ten volumes he has absolutely nothing to say about any of them. This too is his privilege, though it certainly diminishes his competence as a student of Western Civilization and raises grave doubts about his critique of renaissances—especially "of visual arts." But what is irresponsible and unjustifiable to my mind is that he should support his indictment of the Italian Renaissance by passing over in silence what does not readily fit his case.

The second example of Toynbee's lack of the historical conscience may be found in his discussion of "Contacts between Civilizations in Space (Encounters between Contemporaries)" which constitutes Part IX of his work. I shall confine myself to section 5: "The Modern West and the Jews." He begins not with the modern West but with antiquity and after that spends some time on the Jews in Spain under the Visigoths and later under Muslim rule. This discussion should be most interesting, seeing that Toynbee had committed himself to all sorts of implausible theses in his earlier volumes: we must make civilizations the unit of study, he had said, because unlike nations they can be studied in isolation from each other; Western Civilization and Islam are two civilizations which are autonomous in this sense, and the Jews are a fossil (the word is his) of a third, so-called Syriac, civilization. What, then, will Toynbee make of the apparent fusion of these three civilizations? What will he say about Jehuda ben Halevy, Gabirol, and Mai-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

monides' relation to scholasticism? Alas, he does not as much as mention any of them. He might of course plead that he is mainly concerned with "The Modern West and the Jews," though in view of his implausible theses he ought to say something about events which seem to refute them so clearly. What, then, does he have to say about Spinoza? Again, not a single reference in 334 pages of indices. Perhaps Spinoza is not modern enough. What happens when we come to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? What will Toynbee say about the remarkable behavior of this fossil after the emancipation, about the scores of Jewish scientists and thinkers, about the way in which the Jews suddenly entered into Western Civilization and made major contributions? Nothing, absolutely nothing. If medieval Spain does not fit his scheme, he ignores it; and if the Jews are a living refutation of his theories, attack is the best defense.

Toynbee tries to establish the word "Judaical," mainly by using it in this fashion, as a synonym of "fanatical" (by way of contrast with "the gentle and unaggressive ethos of Christianity"), as when he speaks, for example, of "a series of anti-Jewish enactments of a Judaically fanatical ferocity"—enacted by Christians, of course. Toynbee likes to use the epithet "Judaical" for elements of Christianity of which he does not approve. If this prejudice, however unworthy of a historian among all people, is at least common, Toynbee also suggests again and again that "Jew" and "businessman"—not to use a less polite term—are synonymous. This, coupled with his failure to mention in this context a single Jewish scholar, scientist, poet, philosopher, or artist, amounts to a grotesque falsification of history and a complete perversion of the relations between "The Modern West and the Jews."

When he finally comes to "The Fate of the European Jews and the Palestinian Arabs, A.D. 1933-48" and his thesis that "On the Day of Judgment the gravest crime standing to the German National Socialists' account might be, not that they had exterminated the majority of the Western Jews, but that they had caused the surviving remnant of Jewry to stumble," he shows as much contempt for history as any Hollywood director ever did. It is not the merits of Zionism that are at issue here. An intelligent and honest indictment always deserves a hearing, though what one has the right to expect from a historian is first of all an honest account of what happened. Such an account should make us understand what we previously failed to understand; it should enlarge our horizon and affect our prejudices and valuations.

Does Toynbee explain the origin of Zionism with which he deals at great length? Decidedly not. But it is one of the great oddities of his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

work that he prints, in footnotes and appendices, critical comments by scholars who have read parts of his manuscript—and again and again these comments invalidate the text but are left standing without any reply by the author. In the present instance, James Parkes, a Gentile student of anti-Semitism, throws more light on the origin of Zionism in three lines on page 294, not to speak of his two-page "Annex," than does Toynbee in his daydreams and sermons in the text.

I am not advocating a pedestrian approach. A historian should put himself into the place of the men whose decisions he discusses and ask himself what went on in their minds—but naturally after having first used all the available data as the necessary context and clues. Toynbee, however, ignores the most relevant data; and for the sake of his system or sermon he spurns them even after Parkes has called attention to a few of them.

There is no reason why Toynbee should know a great deal about Zionism or Judaism; but as long as he does not, why does he insist on writing about both at such great length? The indices of volumes VI and X (which take care, between them, of all but the first three volumes) contain over four columns of references to the Jews, and a column apiece about "Judaism"—but not a single reference to Hillel or Akiba, not to speak of lesser men or such contemporary representatives as, for example, Buber.

Actually, the name of Hillel is mentioned once in Toynbee's indictment of Zionism: "The image and superscription of this new human coinage was not Hillel's but Caesar's." But a few sentences later, on the same page (311), he pontificates: "This mystical feeling for an historical Eretz Israel, which inspired the Zionist pioneers with the spiritual power to move mountains, was entirely derived from a diasporan orthodox theology that convicted the Zionists of an importunity which verged upon impiety in their attempt to take out of God's hands the fulfillment of God's promise to restore Israel to Palestine on God's own initiative." Clearly, Toynbee does not know one of Hillel's most celebrated dicta: "If I am not for myself, who will be? And if I am for myself only, what am I? And if not now, when?" Nor does Toynbee see the weakness of his own conception of religion which would indeed turn it into a mere opiate by so unhesitatingly divorcing God's initiative from man's.

What is most unjustifiable is surely Toynbee's report to posterity about what happened in Palestine after the British left. In the text he gives the impression that the Jews did to the Arabs precisely what the Nazis had done to the Jews. In a footnote he belatedly admits that "the cold-blooded systematic 'genocide' of several million human be-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ings . . . had no parallel at all in the Jews' ill-treatment of the Palestinian Arabs." But they deprived of "their homes and property" and reduced to the status of "displaced persons" some 684,000 Arabs. In a note this figure is qualified and the Jews are blamed only for 284,000; but these "expulsions," we are told, "were on the heads of all Israel." Did they occur during a war or in the midst of peace? Toynbee does not say, but throughout he gives the consistent, if fantastic, impression that the Jews attacked innocent Arabs to vent the aggressive feelings accumulated during their own persecution by the Nazis. That any Arab had ever fired a shot on a Jew in Palestine before 1948, or that the Arab states had declared war on Israel the moment the British had left their former mandate, and that the Jews were fighting a war in self-defense against armies pledged to exterminate them to the last man, woman, and child—all that is not only not mentioned but brazenly denied by implication.

Judged by high standards, what the Israelis did may well deserve censure, as does, perhaps, our systematic bombing of civilians toward the end of World War II, not to speak of Hiroshima or, worse, Nagasaki. But those who are fighting for their life and liberty can at least plead extenuating circumstances. What can the historian plead who willfully falsifies the history of events with which no man required him to deal?

So much for the historian. Surely, A. J. P. Taylor is too kind when he says: "Professor Toynbee's method is not that of scholarship, but of the lucky dip, with emphasis on the luck." But in a recent note on "What I Am Trying to Do," in the same issue of *International Affairs* in which Sir Ernest Barker offers his strictures, Toynbee tells us: "One of my aims in *A Study of History* has been to try out the scientific approach to human affairs and to test how far it will carry us."

What he proposes to show, as is well known by now, is that some twenty-odd civilizations exemplify certain patterns in their development. Taylor has suggested that Toynbee's scheme was, in fact, a generalization from classical antiquity: "If other civilizations failed to fit into this pattern, they were dismissed as abortive, ossified, or achieving a wrong-headed *tour de force*." This criticism is valid as far as it goes, but it does not bring out the full enormity of Toynbee's method.

In the first place, Toynbee's anthropomorphic conception of civilizations is superstitious: the question how many civilizations there are is like asking how many sciences there are, and the question when a particular civilization originated is on a level with the query when art began. Worse still, the conceit that civilizations are not only individual

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

entities but the only units which can be studied historically one at a time, without referring beyond them, is the height of naiveté. Only a few completely isolated societies can be studied thoroughly without reference to other societies; but any unit whatever, whether a civilization, a nation, a city, a university, or a railroad can be made the object of a historical study in which outside entities are introduced as sparingly as possible. Specifically, no "Syriac Civilization," for example, ever existed, though it may possibly be convenient in some contexts to lump together the many kingdoms that existed between ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia and to give them some such name as this; but this fictitious civilization could hardly be studied very fully without reference to its two mighty neighbors. It should be added that the untenable thesis that civilizations are the only self-contained "intelligible fields of historical study," which Toynbee had argued with much rhetoric and little logic on the first fifty pages of volume I, is quickly, though not pointedly, abandoned at the beginning of volume VII.

Secondly, if you want to verify the presence of a certain pattern in the geneses, growths, breakdowns, and disintegrations of twenty-odd civilizations, the scientific approach would seem obvious. You have to consider your twenty-odd items in turn, admitting frankly where we either lack sufficient evidence or find what does not fit our pattern. But Toynbee spurns this approach. He finds his illustrations in nations and individuals, in Goethe's *Faust* and the New Testament; and he is not beyond illustrating the genesis or growth of a civilization from the fate of a nation, or even a small part of a nation, such as New England, during a period when the civilization to which it belonged was, according to Toynbee, breaking down and incapable of any further growth in any of its parts. His procedure, in short, is unsystematic and inconsistent in the extreme. In this manner no historical laws could possibly be established, even if there were any.

Toynbee's delight at finding several examples of this sort which fit, or seem to him to fit, into his scheme is generally increased by their waywardness. Thus he shows for some seventy pages how civilizations grow, by finding examples of "withdrawal and return" in the lives of Philopoemen, Leo Syrus, Ollivier, Clarendon, Ibn Khaldūn, Kant, and Hamlet, among many others. This sort of thing pleases him so much that he forgets altogether that, to take a single example, Kant, who perhaps lived a withdrawn life, never returned. That students went to Königsberg, which he had never left, is hardly a return; but if it were, what would this prove about the pattern of the growth of civilizations?

That illustrations of this kind could be adduced at random for any

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

theory or pattern whatsoever, Toynbee does not realize any more than that a truly scientific approach would require him to go out of his way to deal specifically (1) with evidence which on the face of it appears to contradict his theories, and (2) with rival constructions of that evidence which, as *he* construes it, does fit.

Consider Part VI, on "Universal States," with which the last four-volume batch begins. It contains a lot of miscellaneous data, but no survey at all of Toynbee's twenty-odd civilizations. Instead of taking them up one by one, Toynbee offers such chapter headings as "The Doom of Tithonus" and "The Price of Euthanasia." To be sure, in this case he also offers a "Table" of "Universal States," reprinted without change from volume VI. Now this table had been criticized some years ago by Pieter Geyl in a brilliant essay on the fatal flaws of "Toynbee's System of Civilizations"—an essay which was reprinted in a book, *The Pattern of the Past,* together with the text of a debate between Toynbee and Geyl. Geyl is passed over in silence in the last four volumes. The only major critic with whom Toynbee deals at length, in a very amusing "Annex" which, however, shows no understanding at all of his critic's position, is R. G. Collingwood. But to return to the fatal Table: Geyl had called attention not only to the triteness and vagueness of Toynbee's so-called laws but also to the startling fact that, according to this Table, there was universal peace in Western Europe from "A.D. 1797-1814," and in the area of "The Danubian Hapsburg Monarchy A.D. 1526-1918." Yet Toynbee did not see fit to revise these claims; his system takes precedence.

Confronted with this sort of thing, it has become customary to say that Toynbee is really a poet. But is not that rather like saying that Cecil B. De Mille is a poet? The Napoleonic wars don't fit, so Toynbee rewrites history. And how much De Mille there is in such a sentence as this: "In the field of encounters in the Time-dimension an Antaean rebound that wins from Necromancy an anticipatory communion with the Future has its antithesis in an Atlantean stance in which a Necromancer who has yielded to the legendary Epimethean impulse of Lot's wife is petrified by the hypnotic stare of a resuscitated corpse's Medusan countenance into the rigidity of a pillar of salt pinned down by the incubus of the Past" (IX, 363).

Is Toynbee really a poet? Toynbee himself says: "As a consequence of his fifteenth-century Italian education, the writer's spiritual home was, not a post-Christian Western World, but a pre-Christian Hellas; and, whenever he was moved to put his deeper and more in-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

timate feelings into words, they found expression in Greek or Latin verse, and not in the English vernacular that happened to be his mother tongue" (IX, 411). Indeed, volumes I and VII begin with two long poems written, respectively, in Greek and Latin; but "intimate feelings" are also expressed frequently in the vernacular of the text in which the author feels less at home. But is it poetry when the author informs us, after giving a reference in a footnote: "My aunt Gertrude's copy, with my name written in it in her handwriting, dated 'September 1906', is here on my desk in May 1951"? Or doesn't it seem to come straight out of a movie? And there are a great many similar passages.

Surely, people begin to think of Toynbee as a poet only where he has raised other expectations and then failed to fulfill them. At the end of Part XI, for example, after well over 200 pages on "Law and Freedom in History," one expects some resolution of the conflict between those who affirm and those who deny the presence of laws in history. But Toynbee concludes: "Since the God who is Love is also Omnipotence, a soul that loves is liberated by the maker and master of all laws from a bondage to laws of the Subconscious Psyche which Babylonian souls used to project on to inexorable stars in their courses and which Hellenic souls used to personify as malignant *kêres* and daimones; and a liberating truth which had once proved potent to set free (John VIII.32) fast-fettered Hellenes and Babylonians might once again be taken to heart by the children of a post-Christian World which had been vainly seeking to ban those dread psychic principalities and powers (Rom. VIII.38; Eph. III.10 and VI.12) in the name of a Science that was as impotent to exorcize them as any pre-Christian magic." I have moved the footnotes into parentheses and might add that probably more than half of Toynbee's footnotes are of this nature. But is this poetry or merely murky?

It might be suggested that Toynbee is really a theologian. In this capacity, however, I should rank him with the friends of Job. To vindicate the justice of God, he regularly infers, as they did, that misfortune is a proof of a prior moral transgression. From the destruction, apparently by external force, of the Central American Indian civilizations, Toynbee infers that they deserved their fate. Evidence to the contrary does not deter Toynbee. Thus he speaks, for example, of churches which "committed spiritual suicide by going into politics" and forfeited the chance of "playing a church's authentic role"; and he continues: "Cases in point were the syncretistic Egyptiac Church . . . Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Nestorianism, and Monophysitism, which had allowed themselves to be used by a submerged Syriac Civilization as weapons in its warfare

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

against a dominant Hellenism." Elsewhere too Toynbee sharply condemns the Jewish uprising of 135 A.D. But, I wonder, did not Islam and Christianity go into politics and wage wars—and not merely to defend a threatened way of life, but aggressive wars? No, says Toynbee in the very same passage from which I have just quoted: "Islam alone had partially succeeded in retrieving a false step into which it had been led in its infancy by its Founder." (VII, 532) Islam has flourished; so Toynbee infers, after the manner of Job's friends, it must have been virtuous. And when our gentle scholar comes to the Crusades, only thirty-five pages after his indictment of the Zionists, he develops all the enthusiasm of a Sunday-morning quarterback as he pictures the victories that might have been, if only the Crusaders had followed his strategy.

In his footnotes Toynbee carries on a prolonged theological discussion with one Martin Wight, a Christian, who eventually draws from our author an admission that he is no longer a Christian. Toynbee's position is developed in an "Annex" on "Higher Religions and Psychological Types." The types are those of Jung (Freud is not listed in any of the indices), and the "higher" religions are the four with the largest following. Toynbee's religious outlook also finds expression at the end of Part XIII (the last Part of his work) when, after piling up quotations in different languages for several pages, he concludes with a long prayer of his own which alternates between Latin and English. I quote two of its twenty stanzas:

> Sancta Dei Genetrix, intercede pro nobis.
> *Mother Mary, Mother Isis, Mother Cybele, Mother Ishtar, Mother Kwanyin, have compassion on us, by whatsoever name we bless thee for bringing Our Savior into the World.*

It would be hard to guess whom this will offend more: Catholics or Protestants? But if hitherto syncretism usually meant an attempt to offend no religion, consider Toynbee's bow to Islam:

> Sancte Petre, intercede pro nobis.
> *Tender-hearted Muhammad, who art also one of the weaker vessels of God's grace, pray that His grace may inspire us. . . .*

For any who might wish to commemorate the event, Toynbee finished this prayer in "London, 1951, June 15, 6:25 p.m., after looking once more, this afternoon, at Fra Angelico's picture of the Beatific Vision."

Immediately before this prayer, Toynbee refers the reader twice to the New Testament, but understandably not to those words in the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Sermon on the Mount: "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret. . . . But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking."

Toynbee's religiousness, like the rest of his work, has something of Hollywood in it: it is spectacular, has a huge cast, and is, for all its ostentatious humility, charged with self-importance. And his conceit is essentially different from the self-stylization of Socrates in his Apology or of Nietzsche or Shaw. It is more like that of a movie star: there is neither sarcasm in it nor any discrimination between what is representative and what is trivial. In the first two indices, little space was given to the author, and hardly more to God. In the new index both have attained to two whole columns, and many references to "Toynbee, Arnold Joseph" are on the level of "walking, liking for."

There are of course many good things in these volumes, including not only some of the contributions of Toynbee's critics, which he had the good grace to print, but also occasional thought-provoking judgments, many fascinating quotations and observations, and several good anecdotes. More's the pity that it all does not add up to a great work. Far from being more scientific than Spengler, whom he calls a "pontifical-minded man of genius," Toynbee is more pontifical, less original, and endowed with an essentially eclectic and digressive mind. What suggests the possibility of greatness in Toynbee's case is mainly the lavish expenditure and sheer size of his undertaking. Beyond that, the fashionable taste for a mixture of almost any kind of religion with erudition has helped to make Toynbee one of the idols of our new illiteracy.

This illiteracy does not know the distinction between erudition and scholarship, between irresponsibility and poetry, between assurance and evidence. One reads Toynbee's indictments and is impressed by the wealth of footnotes, and one does not notice that they sometimes refer to nothing but other passages in which the same unfounded claim is made, supported by similar cross-references—or that a spectacular figure is cut down to less than half its size in a note; or that a splashy fifty-page claim is unostentatiously dropped in a few sentences, much later. In an age in which similar techniques beset us so sorely, the scholar bears a greater responsibility than ever. I have no quarrel with the virtues Toynbee advocates. "The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BOOKS

POETRY CHRONICLE

COLLECTED POEMS. By Edith Sitwell. Vanguard. $6.50.
COLLECTED POEMS, 1955. By Robert Graves. Doubleday. $4.50.
POEMS: COLLECTED AND NEW. By Rolfe Humphries. Scribners. $4.50.
SELECTED POEMS. By Randall Jarrell. Knopf. $4.00.
THE SHIELD OF ACHILLES. By W. H. Auden. Random House. $3.00.
A MANTELPIECE OF SHELLS. By Ruthven Todd. Bonacio and Saul, with Grove. $3.00.
THE SCARECROW CHRIST AND OTHER POEMS. By Elder Olson. Noonday. $3.00.
WILDERNESS STAIR. By Ben Belitt. Grove. $3.00.
THE SALT GARDEN. By Howard Nemerov. Little, Brown. $3.00.
BIRTHDAYS FROM THE OCEAN. By Isabella Gardner. Houghton Mifflin. $3.00.
THE MIDDLE VOICE. By Constance Carrier. Swallow. $2.00.

There is not much to be said for the poetry round-up as a form of criticism. A group of unrelated books assembled more or less by editorial accident, a kind of *ad hoc* umpire who may have something to say about some of them in a space so limited as to preclude adequate discussion of any of them, and a request to write. Write what? That the life work of A or B, now for the third or fourth time collected and made definitive, is more entertaining than X's first thin vol. or the casual emission of Y in mid-passage? This would be unfair to everyone concerned. We know A and B; they have settled in, established themselves long since. We know Y, too, well enough to say that he is not in top form on this occasion, that he has done better in the past and will presumably do better again. Perhaps we do not know X at all, though we have probably seen his poems here and there in the Reviews. And what of the writers who were once so promising, who seem to promise no longer? What of the writers who get themselves published and turn out to be respectably unreadable? Unreadable for whom? And who says so? No, the form is unhappy to begin with, and no good can come of it; but since the poetry round-up, like the fiction round-up and the drama round-up, is a convenient institution making for neatness and suggesting that someone, however inappropriately, has thought about

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the books on display, we must admit its absurdity and get on with it nevertheless.

In any such process two of these works can—indeed, should—be recognized, saluted, and dropped from discussion. Miss Sitwell's *Collected Poems* and the *Collected Poems, 1955* of Mr. Robert Graves demand the leisurely consideration that is the due of established poets at the height of their power. They also demand such a critic as Mr. Blackmur or—let me say simply Mr. Blackmur. I would rather have them read generally than any of the other poets, bar one, that are under discussion here; but they are cases apart. I shall only reaffirm my admiration for the virtuosity of Miss Sitwell's earlier poems, and my conviction that in her work since 1940 she has achieved one of the difficult lovely summits in contemporary art. She can be diffuse, ornate, vain, portentous, all to the heroic degree; she is never negligible, and never mean. Similarly Mr. Graves, who is as fine a poet though certainly a less spectacular one, can confuse us (as Yeats often does) with his mystico-mythological preoccupations and worry us sometimes with an inconsequential kind of male stridor; yet his poems stand up in the light like hills, and even at his weakest there is a force in him that is generous and pure. Neither poet, I think, has the stature of Mr. Auden; but *The Shield of Achilles* is a transient work, mostly Auden *in absentia,* and should not be compared with what amounts to an *Opera Omnia.*

One is tempted to treat Mr. Humphries in the same cavalier way, for his *Poems: Collected and New* is largely a recollection, an *Opera Quasi Omnia,* to which the latest poems add little. He is not, of course, of the first rank; neither is he an experimental or a tendentious poet; but one must look far, and read too much, before encountering a more agreeable lyrist. Possibly because he is a Latinist (but so is Miss Carrier) —at any rate, there is something solid and passionately clear from which he derives his tactile language, a heard language, utterly unlike the prettily stanza'd eye-language that one finds in so many of these books. He can write what most of his younger contemporaries could not even if the idea should occur to them: sustained, intricate music. And his music is generally worth listening to. It is a pity that in this collection he chooses to keep so much that is ephemeral, so much that is merely playful—padding, when there was no need for padding. And it must be confessed that his bluff wit, like that of Mr. Graves, is sometimes hard to endure. But with all these reservations noted, let us see. *Not sick, nor bent on self-destruction either*—I deliberately take one of his early poems because when I first met it, years ago, it seemed exact, inevitable; and it has stuck in my mind ever since:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SONNET IN VAIN

Not sick, nor bent on self-destruction either,
I can not sleep for thinking I must die,
The proud warm substance of the body wither,
Turn humble-cold, and I no more be I.
Hot cruelty, sick love, and lonely sleep
Are not so much to live for, nor this murk
So permeate with air and fire to keep
The heart assiduous at its crimson work.

But the doom's wonder of the heavy slow
Swing of the turning earth around the sun
Is no mean force that easily lets go,
No paltry fare that hunger gnaws upon.
Son of a rich intolerable swarm
Profusion-bred to die, O Rolfe, stay warm!

Maybe I can not see it clearly. Sonnets are toys in our time, *pacè* Merrill Moore, and this one has some of the flaws of sonnet language—"permeate," "paltry fare," "lonely sleep"—; moreover, it is very 'young' poetry in its overtness, as though a man should climb out of his Rilke-machine and campaign in the suburbs for love, or God, or Spring. True. But it works nevertheless, not least in the Lucretian nobility of the first two lines of the sestet; and even if I am seeing it in distortion, so amorous is time, I find in it the sting and suasion of the responsible true poem.

The word catches me up as a dust-jacket reminds me that in 1948 I was 'responsible' for calling Mr. Randall Jarrell's *Losses* "a memorable book." Hardly a memorable phrase, but let it pass: I certainly do not want to retract it. What I believed then I still believe about *Selected Poems*: that Mr. Jarrell is immediately and devastatingly right in certain brief lyrics, notably those dealing with war; that he is impressive in many of his longer, more loosely organized compositions; and that he tries both ear and patience when he decides to be Orphic. He is a satirical moralist, really, of the tragic order; the poetry is a vehicle, serviceable for swift excursions but unexpectedly lacking in discipline. I hope so, at any rate: otherwise I should be reduced to the unethical stratagem of blaming myself for being so often bored by a poet who should be incapable of inflicting boredom. Let me pass over, then, the lyrics that we should all admire and envy, and investigate the symptoms of something else. I find them in "A Girl in a Library," first of all in a Note explaining that poem:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"A Girl in a Library" is a poem about the New World and the Old: about a girl, a student of Home Economics and Physical Education, who has fallen asleep in the library of a Southern college; about a woman who looks out of one book, Pushkin's *Eugen Onegin,* at this girl asleep among so many; and about the *I* of the poem, a man somewhere between the two. A *blind date* is an unknown someone you accompany to something; if he promises to come for you and doesn't, he has *stood you up.* The Corn King and the Spring Queen went by many names; in the beginning they were the man and woman who, after ruling for a time, were torn to pieces and scattered over the fields in order that the grain might grow.

Some of my readers will say with a smile, "And now aren't you going to tell us who said, 'Against stupidity the gods themselves struggle in vain'? who said, 'Man wouldn't be the best thing in this world if he were not too good for it'? who had said to him, as a boy, 'Don't cry, little peasant'?" No. This would take too much space, and would be a sort of interference with the reader—and I don't want to do any more, in this introduction, than put in an occasional piece of information that may be useful to some readers.

This seems disingenuous, though it may be only unkind. If one really wants to be useful to some readers, there are things in "A Girl in a Library" that deserve more "explanation" than *blind date* does, arcane locution though that be; and some readers need not have smiled through so long a sentence if Mr. Jarrell had simply printed "Schiller," and so on, instead of going coy. What we have here is actually a noteless Note. The Corn King and the Spring Queen and Tatyana Larina are identifiable fun—as is the ballad of *Samuel Hall,* which Mr. Jarrell misquotes and bowdlerizes in another Note—, but they are not, like political characters in Dante, solved by footnotes, and unless they are assimilated into the poem they are obstructive at worst and decorative at best. A serious problem: in his two excellent "Karamazov" poems in *Wilderness Stair* Mr. Ben Belitt has shown how it may be worked out; but Mr. Jarrell, in the present poem and in too many others, imposes allusion without effecting any integration, and then teases or enrages his reader with a propitiatory Note. For "A Girl" is a nice girl, in her sleepy way, and she deserves something better than the allusive, donnish condescension that she gets:

One sees in your blurred eyes
The "uneasy half-soul" Kipling saw in dogs'.

It may be so; but the verses should first have been read aloud, Kipling or no Kipling.

Yet it is some comfort to reflect that only a good poet can disturb us so by his lapses. Our Library Girl is in excellent company; indeed,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

she can put on the armor of Achilles if she wants to, or take her naps among assorted Winds, Woods, Mountains, Lakes, Islands, Plains, and Streams, all pleasantly sublet from Mr. Auden. *The Shield of Achilles,* as I have said, suggests work in transit; except in its fine third section, *Horae Canonicae,* it comes as close to inconsequence as Mr. Auden is capable of coming. The title poem, which has been much praised, seems curiously insufficient. The contrasted sets of images—the Noble, which Thetis hoped to see, and the Ignoble, which Hephaestos actually fashioned—are too neatly arranged; the irony, for all the dexterity and grace of the writing, is too assertive, as though in demonstration; and the poem concludes with an automatism of Homeric and almost-Homeric epithets:

The thin-lipped armorer,
Hephaestos, hobbled away;
Thetis of the shining breasts
Cried out in dismay
At what the god had wrought
To please her son, the strong
Iron-hearted man-slaying Achilles
Who would not live long.

Only at the end does a moral point really engage us: the goddess is dismayed, not because Achilles must die early (and in any event it was his choice), but because his brief life was not to be falsified by dream-images derived from some Grecian Urn. It seems almost an afterthought. Yet it is the kind of afterthought that stays; and it is the forethought, the very driving thought, of the *Horae Canonicae.* These laic meditations on Pride, on Indifference, on Disgust, figure the Offices for Good Friday, which is every day of our lives. Rarely, I think, has the poet been more compelling than in the best of these pieces, "Sext," "Nones," and "Compline." The colloquial Audenesque, which can be so dismaying ("Just reeling off their names is ever so comfy") or so spurious ("As when past Iseult's tower you floated/The willow pash-notes of wanted Tristram"), not only justifies itself here, but is the unanswerable, inevitable instrument. A parade of pastoral eclogues as pretty and as vacant as Theokritos himself; a lovely song or two; some epigrams, including a most perishable epitaph for a cat—and then this poetry. *Finis coronat opus*: for once the battered tag looks fresh.

Of the remaining books, only Miss Gardner's holds me particularly —she writes awarely, with a tumbling kind of audacity that could easily become mannered; she has wit; and she can hear. At this moment of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

postlude I like her best because she is alive: Active Voice. So many other published voices are not: they are conscientiously feeling Rilke, feeling Rimbaud, feeling Melville, feeling Yeats, feeling Feeling, or feeling temporarily not much of anything at all. Even Mr. Todd, who has shown elsewhere that his veins run with blood and not with some cola derivate—even he manages to be dull here, not least when he is insisting, in catarrh-clogged numbers, upon the value of excess. "The tepid truth inflict[s] a wound," he reports; but he is wrong. This time his whole book seems wrong, and I find it alarming that he can imagine, let alone print, such verses as these from an inappropriately soporific Epithalamium:

May the voyage on which you verge
Be kind and pleasing to you both;
May your happinesses merge
East and West and North and—

yes: South. "Voyage: verge," for the love of Cythereia! *A Mantelpiece of Shells* may be a momentary aberration; but Mr. Olson's *The Scarecrow Christ* seems to mean itself, which is a depressing thought. Not long ago the author wrote a discerning book about the poetry of Dylan Thomas, yet to judge from these verses you would think that he had never heard of technic, of anything that the ear can control. His lines are ugly, not with the ugliness of art, but with the surd ugliness of untested speech. Meanwhile his symbols hunch by you like trucks on a wet night. Mr. Humphries can be fairly overt with his symbols, too: witness "The Good Swimmer," for instance; but he manages them with an arrogant expertness, while Mr. Olson merely lumbers. Mr. Nemerov can handle them too, as he demonstrates in a wholly successful poem called "Sunday at the End of Summer," where a quiet construction of detail builds up to an admirable release; but he is not often so lucky, and the greater part of his book is an exercise in silent writing. Even Mr. Belitt, whose first book promised so much, seems merely civil, too civil, and certainly more solemn than serious. And Miss Carrier, who is obviously gifted, who seems to know what she is about even when she defaces her lines with such jukebox barbarisms as "tho"—is it not symptomatic of this group that she, too, should so often recede with a sigh just at the brink of success? It is almost perverse to write a poem as good as "Death in the Afternoon" or "Peter at Fourteen" and then lapse into an attitude. Attitudes? These are like Mr. Todd's "tepid truth"; but if only they made something more than sense! Rhetorical attitudes, like Mr. Auden's or Miss Sitwell's or Miss Gardner's; conscious attitudes; dramatic atti-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tudes; even silly attitudes—poses, if you like, or narcissism, or be-damned-to-you coloratura—anything but this dim date with someone to accompany you to something & maybe merge a few happinesses.

Dudley Fitts

THE ENGLISH LITERARY SITUATION

THE MODERN WRITER AND HIS WORLD. By G. S. Fraser. Criterion Books. $3.95.

Mr. Fraser's resourceful and intelligent book is a survey of literature in England over the last fifty to seventy-five years. It has five sections—"The Background of Ideas," "The Novel," "The Drama," "Poetry," "The Trends of Criticism"—which together make a fairly complete literary history. But even though the book was written as part of an academic duty when the author was lecturing in Japan in 1950, it is not an exhaustive study. The book is very rich in objective judgments and analyses of the English writers (much more so than I am going to be able to suggest in this review), yet the author's purpose has been to reassess the older generations in relation to what he conceives to be the necessities of his own generation.

Mr. Fraser is a poet and critic of the post-Auden era. He began by being associated with "The Apocalypse" group. In later years this movement broadened out into "Neo-Romanticism," a movement which included not only Apocalyptics (if that is the word), like Henry Treece and Nicholas Moore, but anarchist and pacificist poets like Alex Comfort. The neo-Romantics responded especially to the work of Herbert Read, George Barker, and Dylan Thomas. They have regarded themselves as "poets of the image" rather than as "poets of the statement" like Auden and Empson, and their effort has been to shift poetry from the ideological basis it had in the 'thirties and to involve it more fully in the archetypal experiences of man. Mr. Fraser applauds the supersession of Marxist thought by a more traditional liberalism. He notes, apparently with approval, that Jung is now a much stronger influence among English writers than Freud.

It would be wrong though to think of Mr. Fraser as belonging very strictly to any school or movement. He is not in this book noticeably "romantic" or "apocalyptic"—far from it. What interests him is how to live as a writer in modern England. He has seen many careers in his own generation spoiled by the war and the anxieties and maladjustments of its aftermath. His subject is the fate of the writer in a dis-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rupted urban culture. His concern is for those poets and novelists who went through the war in their twenties and now, as they get on toward forty, have to admit that their careers are still fragmentary, their impact on their time not yet made. Mr. Fraser finds that things look pretty bleak for the serious writer in England. And at the end of his book he repeats the rather joyless exhortation expressed by Eliot in "Little Gidding":

Not fare well,
But fare forward, voyagers.

As Mr. Fraser judges things, this is not the time for the refurbishing of doctrines. It is a time for a deeply conservative reconsideration of all those solid and enduring habits and sentiments for which the English are famous and which humanize individual lives and transmute a social order into a community and a culture.

One gathers that this is the dominant mood in England these days, although it is certainly well for an outsider not to try to judge too closely. Mr. Fraser himself reminds us of this when he flatly misinforms his readers, on the basis of an essay by Randall Jarrell, that the literary departments of American universities are manned by phalanxes of literal-minded disciples of Empson and Leavis. The mood of Mr. Fraser and his contemporaries is at any rate a very powerful one and in many ways is paralleled in America.

The Modern Writer and His World makes a stand against ideology; it has an empirical mistrust of ideas themselves. For example, the questions that would perhaps occur to an American or a French writer about "alienation" are not even raised. "Alienation" for Mr. Fraser is not an idea or a historical situation; it is simply a condition to be avoided.

Mr. Fraser commends contemporary literature for scaling itself down to more modest but more fundamental interests than it has had in the past:

> Thus if much of the best writing of the 1930s was based on a clear scheme of notions; and much of the best writing of the 1920s on the proud self-assertion of the individual sensibility; some of the best novels and stories of the last ten years, on the other hand, are not based on either of these things, but rather on a clinging to what seems in human life, in a shifting and dangerous world, centrally and lastingly important.

Probably most Americans who are not middlebrows and/or philistines would not allow themselves to say this, lest they sound like Mr.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

J. Donald Adams. *The Modern Writer and His World* unfortunately furnishes much ammunition to international philistia. The author himself, however, is not a philistine, though he may be, by American standards, a middlebrow (not that American standards are higher; they are merely different, because we have in this country variations and contradictions of taste and opinion much more extreme than those in England). Mr. Fraser is a man of acute literary intelligence and sensibility who is determined at all costs to be plain, candid, downright, and, to use one of his own words, "wholesome." He even makes us think that he is being candid and realistic rather than insufferable when, in speaking of *Lady Chatterley's Lover,* he says that "young readers, in particular, may often derive an improper and unhealthy excitement from the detailed description of sexual episodes." Maybe so, but let's not go into all *that.*

The general question one wants to pose for Mr. Fraser's consideration is this. What makes him think that his post-Burkean, bourgeois family-man's liberal conservatism, however admirable it may be as a political or personal credo, has necessarily a bearing on the future of literature, or on our efforts to enhance and vindicate it? Aren't we bourgeois family men—we Miltons, Blakes, Melvilles, Twains, and Joyces—a little free in the life of the imagination? And isn't *that* life a life of hazard and glory?

As moralists we may sympathize with Mr. Fraser. One may sometimes share his doubts about Mallarmé's tendency to destroy poetry by making it its own subject matter, or Rimbaud's disastrous translation of life into a form of poetry. One may disapprove of the inhumanity of Shaw's doctrine of the immanent will, or Lawrence's ill-defined but vehement prophecies, or the disorderly melodramas of Conrad, or the "perpetual rediscovery of the Absolute on every second page . . . of classic American literature" (even though this latter may be "one of the grand contributions to the tradition of English writing"). But would literature really be better off—would it be half so well off—if these great writers had been less violent, contradictory and transcendental, less colorful and unmanageable, if they had had more of the solid virtues? (I cannot help mentioning at this point Mr. Fraser's deplorable rewriting of a passage from Lawrence's *Studies in Classic American Literature* in order to make it available to the plain reader. Doubtless there is a lot of mysterious jargon in Lawrence and it is up to the critic to explain the meaning as he grasps it. But he is not called on to *improve* Lawrence.)

One may value, with Mr. Fraser, the intuitive conservatism of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

women and admire the works of Miss Rosamond Lehmann and Miss Elizabeth Bowen. One may agree with Robert Graves (not to mention Mary Pickford), as Mr. Fraser does, that "our world would be a better and happier world if women played a larger part in the ordering of it." One may agree that "England, after all, owes a great deal to her philistines," who always come through in times of crisis. One may counter the criticism of I. A. Richards and the Cambridge school by observing that "stock responses" are not always bad but may be positive continuators of tradition and useful habit. All this is incontrovertible. Perhaps it is relevant to the future of literature. But how?

Mr. Fraser is so committed to his empirical conservatism and to finding the plain, irreducible, living substance in all writers and all things that he becomes in some ways a doctrinaire in spite of himself. He longs for a future situation which will somewhat recapitulate the high Victorian era, when once again there will be that "relatively stable background, to which we only today aspire." (Having been a neo-Romantic a few years ago, he is now ready to be a neo-Victorian.) One can understand humanly why he should be moved by this image of stability. But it leads him into erroneous historical formulations. It is simply not true that "the great novels of the past" have arisen wholly or in part because their authors could count on "an established order which [they] might judge to be in the main a good or in the main an evil order, but which was in either case reliably *there*." From Cervantes to Balzac, Stendhal, Dickens, George Eliot, and Proust, the author's feeling was precisely that the established order was *not* reliably there, that, indeed, it was being subverted and superseded. If we take up Mr. Fraser's view of the matter we are going to wind up in the arms, at worst, of Galsworthy and, at best, of Jane Austen.

Apparently it is the paradoxically doctrinaire Fraser who finds in *The Cocktail Party* Eliot's best play, because it expresses with "massive and compressed moral strength," an ordinary, modern human involvement. He quotes the well-known passage about the routine life as opposed to the saintly life:

> *They may remember*
> *The vision they have had, but they cease to regret it,*
> *Maintain themselves by the common routine,*
> *Learn to avoid expectation,*
> *Become tolerant of themselves and others,*
> *Giving and taking, in the usual actions*
> *What there is to give and take.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Surely Lionel Trilling is right about this passage, and Eliot's play in general, when he observes how little of "the sentiment of Being" it has. The last act of *The Cocktail Party,* in which all those well-bred people sit around congratulating themselves because dear old Celia has been satisfactorily crucified on an ant-hill, strikes me as being a really unpardonable display of unction and cruel genteel hauteur (the first time that Eliot has allowed himself such a display). It passes understanding that anyone can find the participants "mature and likeable people"—until we recall that a *totally* equable and common-sense view such as Mr. Fraser's produces moral distortions just like any other total view.

How to sum up one's feelings about Mr. Fraser's complex, resourceful, and usable book? Well, to come right out with it, after you have said all the good things and thought a whole lot more and after you have pointed out one or two bad things, the fact remains that by all the standards we have been appealing to in the modern development of literature it is a rather inert, even a retrogressive book by an author who too often wants to find the most admirable way of being content with the second-rate. Let us provisionally grant that this may be a traditionally mysterious English way to greatness. Still, it is up to us all to decide whether the historical situation is so desperate as to justify Mr. Fraser's guarded and prudent view of the writer and his world. I don't think it is.

Richard Chase

WAY BEYOND INNOCENCE

AN END TO INNOCENCE. By Leslie A. Fiedler. Beacon Press. $3.50.

Leslie Fiedler's essays, collected in a volume he has called *An End to Innocence,* are so vividly and ruthlessly argued that the reading of them gives some of the pained enjoyment and partisan excitement of a good sports event. These works create in the mind a feeling of agitation and nervous responsiveness. As you go along, you experience not only your own ideas upon the various topics, but simultaneously you imagine the effect these arguments and opinions will have upon other readers. We believe, as we are perhaps too likely to do, that others will be shocked where we are amused, recalcitrant or sentimental where we are realistic and easily convinced by the author's views. In any case, there at your elbow is that character from farce, the Professor of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

American Literature, looking like Harold Lloyd hit with a pie when he reads "Come Back to the Raft Ag'in, Huck Honey!" and finds his innocent charges in the arms of their dark-skinned friends. In the essays on Italy you go through the alarm of expatriates from Paris, the Rhine, or Idaho when they discover that Italy's painstaking, epical dignities have been turned to the translation of American murder mysteries, her pure craftsmanship spent upon a spurious Mickey Mouse, her macaroni-soft beauties transmogrified into slim, peroxided strangers, her Latin lovers gone bilious and haunted by fears of a "fiasco." In the political essays, you may feel curiosity and concern for the slapped cheeks and bruised shins. These shivers of lenience and solicitude on the reader's part are the measure of Fiedler's openness in stating his angriest feelings, his stubborn clarity about his own position. An over-elaborate style, fondness for the abstruse and abstract, the unconvincingly lengthy and the unexpectedly general, even the dull, are often means by which a writer succeeds in hiding from his readers, and sometimes from himself, his honest thoughts. There is none of that craven relief in this collection. We do not even occasionally stumble upon the essayist in the act of laboriously expressing himself upon a matter in which his genuine interest is clearly slight. In this way, either by caution in choice or admirable self-knowledge or some luck of temperament, Fiedler does not find himself, as young critics so often do, giving a forced and breathless performance on an uncongenial theme.

Husky assertiveness, bluntness and a good deal of coarseness are characteristic of Fiedler's writings. Even when the subject does not promise it, we nevertheless keep shamefully expecting some naked assertion, some prudery manfully challenged. The erotic and the controversial meet whenever it can be logically arranged. "The Teeth," an early piece of Fiedler's fiction, was remarkable for its power, among other things, to make the reader feel morally and physically embarrassed; a later work, "Pull Down Vanity!", is an overwhelmingly exact portrayal of sex and idea in a very lifelike collision. In his assertiveness, his indignant facing up to life, he has the threatening tone which is the mark of the controversialist, the nervous assurance necessary to one who sees the audience as sullen opponents rather than as hungry sheep. Where the satirical writer masters ridicule, the polemical one perfects, like a polished gem, this abrupt and bullying sparkle of argument and statement. (These adjectives are meant to describe *tones* not actions and no suggestion of personal heartlessness is intended.)

Fiedler's most famous essays are the one on the homoerotic element in American literature ("Come Back to the Raft") and a later one

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

called "Afterthoughts on the Rosenbergs." The first treats Huck and Ishmael and Natty Bumppo: "At the focus of emotion, where we are accustomed to find in the world's great novels some heterosexual passion . . . we come instead on the fugitive slave and the no-account boy lying side by side on a raft borne by an endless river toward an impossible escape, or the pariah sailor waking in the tattooed arms of the brown harpooner on the verge of their impossible quest." This essay, read once more among the others in the book, still seems fresh and brilliant and extreme. It is strangely literal in its understanding of the secretly mythical. Color guilt and the love of man for man whisper their names loud enough for all to hear. The deeper innocence shrinks back further into the shades. It will not be possible for some years to read *Huckleberry Finn* or *Moby-Dick* without the glare, wanted or resented, of this flashlight. The "suggestiveness"—in both meanings of the word—of Fiedler's work on this theme is complete.

The essay on Ethel and Julius Rosenberg is more "literary" than, for instance, the article on *From Here to Eternity*. The Rosenbergs are judged, to a great degree, by aesthetic values, while Jones's work of fiction is looked at as a social document. The real people are disappointing as "characters"—they are, the Rosenbergs, seen as rather dull fanatics who pushed themselves into the darkness of treason. The critic, making a newspaper acquaintance with this unfortunate couple who have committed the ultimate act and are faced with the ultimate punishment, is fascinated. And yet the critical mind is not satisfied with what is given; some refinement, some complexity, some greatness of view, some memorable gift of expression seem to be demanded from those who are standing so grimly on the edge of eternity. The Rosenbergs, looked at with the eye of a literary man, seem too "superficial" for their immense doom. They wrote so badly that they become, as one would say of a character in a poorly written novel, "flat" and "unreal," "not able to think of themselves as real people," not able actually to have a self because "the line between the person and the case, between private and public, had been broken down for them." And worst of all, "the Rosenbergs were quite incapable of saying in their last letters just what it was for which they thought they were dying."

But these two people *did* make their point and it was quite clear for what they were dying. Their letters are painful, awful documents and yet utterly expected, shatteringly authentic. Fiedler wants life to measure up to art. The Rosenbergs' failure to be great and deep is a failure he sees as so thorough that it has some sort of superior force and hold upon us—this very failure is at last offered as the ground upon

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

which we should have given them a reprieve. They don't quite earn their death; they aren't big enough for it. "The betrayal of their essential humanity by their comrades and themselves left the burden of its defense upon us." Mercy is an aesthetic necessity. Fiedler wants mercy for the Rosenbergs and yet he fails, in the words of the common saying, to do them justice. His demands upon them are intolerable; he wants to tell Communists and traitors just what sort of speeches and letters are proper. He ignores or fails to take seriously enough the Rosenbergs' peculiar and mysterious triumph. Nearly everyone, everywhere, felt uneasy about this execution and certainly Fiedler no less than others. His analysis of this uneasiness as a kind of benevolent mist rising out of the Rosenbergs' bad taste, a cloud of generosity covering their errors of feeling and expression, is as fascinating as it is outlandish. The whole thing becomes a novel with a weak ending. The uneasiness among ourselves and other people was more complicated. We were not asked to restore the Rosenbergs to the order of delicate feelings and daring generosity in the face of danger, but ourselves. Perhaps this was a foolish request which no nation could be asked to honor. The reason the request was made had very little to do with the vulgarity of the Rosenberg letters, the fraudulent religious appeals, or the Rosenbergs' supposed loss of their "humanity." These are definitions from the literary world, not from the world of political and national emotions.

All the essays in this excellent collection heat up a boil of argument and dissent. Fiedler lectures, he presumes, he asserts with impatience. On the liberals, the 'thirties, and like subjects it is difficult to tell just what age the author is since he is everywhere on his own terms. He seems to come up to all of us, whatever our age, saying, "I've got all your good qualities, but none of your defects." You are reminded of a new drug which has no past but a great future; it works and yet who knows what extended use may bring.

Still, the remaining emotion at the end of this book is that Fiedler's talent is unusual, his brashness is genuine, and his work is always of the greatest interest. For those feelings, one can put up with a lot.

Elizabeth Hardwick

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SMALL LATIN BUT MORE GREEK?

THE SHAKESPEAREAN MOMENT and Its Place in the Poetry of the Seventeenth Century. By Patrick Cruttwell. Columbia University Press. $3.75.

This book is a contribution to the "What went wrong?" school of discussion on seventeenth-century poetry. I found it stimulating, scholarly, with a widely referential basis; not only in poetic quotation, but in history and politics. But if one accepted Mr. Cruttwell's main conclusions one would in practice be left feeling as hopeless about a future for English poetry and, in particular, for a new age of poetic drama, as literary books which deal with the scientific and rationalistic developments of the seventeenth century generally intend to leave one. Admittedly, Mr. Cruttwell is much more descriptive than theoretical and if there is any ax-grinding, it is almost below the auditory threshold. Not quite: there are vague noises, sometimes almost distinct, of "Anglo-Catholic in religion, Royalist in politics, and Classical in literature" and of "the split in sensibility," but the imputation of willfulness is refreshingly absent. If Mr. Cruttwell detects a poetic decline since the days of Shakespeare and Donne, and if he attributes it to causes which are not dissimilar to those put forward by Mr. Eliot and others, he recognizes the organic nature of the situation more clearly than they do and does not toy with the idea that the poets ran out on the medieval structure of religion and politics, like naughty boys, and ought now to be returning from their prodigality.

But though his diagnosis and prognosis is thus less dilettante and less based on nostalgia, it is perhaps even more radically pessimistic. His strength lies in the fact that he concentrates on the actual poetic phenomena which make the work of the Elizabethan dramatists and poets, particularly Shakespeare and Donne, unique and startling: above all their capacity for fusing widely discrepant elements and for informing every particle of their poetic structure with dramatic dialectic. But it is possible to see the Elizabethan poetic world after this fashion—as a product of high improbability resulting from tensions and pressures which are not likely to recur—without being certain of the entropy of the poetic universe. Mr. Cleanth Brooks, for instance, thought that the poetic universe thus ran down after the seventeenth century: but he also thought that it at least partially wound itself up again in the twentieth. And this is interesting, because his analysis of the Elizabethan type of poetic intensity and profundity, its power of fusion of opposing elements, including the ugly and the satirical, its inherent dramatic irony

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and its essential wit—is very close to Mr. Cruttwell's own: while he diagnoses the destructive blight much more emphatically as science and rationalism. But science-and-rationalism or not, the twentieth-century poets, many of them, from Auden onwards, did according to Mr. Brooks recapture some of their drama, metaphoric fusion and wit, their true 'metaphysical' capacity. How they did this, since science and rationalism continue to flourish and since Mr. Brooks does not adopt the contemporary religious panacea, we need not go into here.

But the general answer may be that the problem can only be understood in purely poetic terms. That is wide enough. It means that what is happening in religion and politics and all the continual ideological and physical wars of mankind, disturbing and significant though that may be, is in the long run less important than what the poets are making out of it in their primitive and mythopoeic interpretation and contribution.

We still like to think of Shakespeare as the Great Anonymity, as though he were a kind of literary *Marie Celeste*. We even like to think of him as warbling his native wood-notes wild. But more today than at any time, perhaps because we have since had three centuries covering intellectual patrons, intellectual hostesses and non-intellectual radio-listeners, we cannot really understand how he got away without explaining himself in a critical theory of poetry which "those who ran" (from the creative cooperation of reading the poetry) might read instead.

What we forget is that all the best criticism of poetry has been written by poets simply analyzing their own creative processes. Poet-critics, from Coleridge and Wordsworth to Mr. Eliot, humanly sympathizing with our partly instinctive, partly schoolroom hatred of reading the poetry itself, have been obliging enough to write down, in limpid prose, what they thought they were doing themselves, with something of what they thought their social and psychological impingements were doing to them in driving them to be poets. They have consoled—or revenged—themselves, for this necessity of making social contact at a sub-poetic level, by erecting their private poetic necessities or prejudices into critical laws: "This is not merely the way that *The Lyrical Ballads* were in fact composed, it is the way that all poetry worthy of the name is and ought to be composed."

What Mr. Cruttwell emphasizes so interestingly is that Shakespeare was just as critical, just as theorizing as any other poet, aware of himself, of his own art and its difficulties, of the crises and developments of the society around him, and in particular of the conflicting claims of his own popular dramatic urge and of the learned and courtly society

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to which he somehow felt he belonged by virtue of sensibility and intellect. The difference between Shakespeare and most other poets was that he kept all this tension under his poetic hat—with great advantage: it was a continual feedback into his developing dramatic poetry.

Both Shakespeare and Donne were supremely aware of the dialectic of the life around them. And Mr. Cruttwell is profoundly correct in directing our minds to the essentially and completely dramatic nature of Donne's poetry and also to the fact that lateness of publication makes us forget that he was an Elizabethan. Where I think Mr. Cruttwell is wrong is in time-pointing this dialectic as sharply as he has done. Shakespeare and Donne were aware of it, because they were supremely and naturally poetic, not because they stood on an Elizabethan peak, half-titillating and half-torturing themselves with thoughts of the approaching tumble into Civil War, Puritanism, rationalism, science and democracy: not because their most profound observation was of a last union between civil forms and ecclesiastical ideology which would never be repeated. This is Mr. Cruttwell's explanation of the "Shakespearean moment" and its uniqueness. (I admit that he makes a better case for it with Donne.)

He does not claim that Shakespeare was an orthodox Christian but his theory of the Shakespearean moment depends on classing Shakespeare with Donne and other poets who appear to be standing on this Elizabethan watershed, when there was still a complete and all-pervading medieval unity of soul and body; spiritual authority and the body politic; Church and State; "precarious, soon to be lost, but alive for all that." Awareness of the coming clash, the imminent chaos, "its nearness but its avoidance, gives the poetry its force." And further, this type of dialectic awareness, according to Mr. Cruttwell, provides the only true tragic art.

For Mr. Cruttwell, the tragic sense is essentially Christian, which means that the dramatist is without illusions on the worldly level about the behavior and fates of men, but believes that these fates are redeemed on another level. "For Christians, the terms on which the tragic sense can be kept are original sin . . . and redemption." But clearly he does not think that non-Christians can have it on their own terms.

The poetry of the Shakespearean moment then, sprang from a "deep underlying Christian Toryism"—conservative and orthodox. (Does the grinding noise begin to rise over the auditory threshold?) And the development of the progressive and optimistic mentality, represented both by Puritans and Rationalists, destroys the tragic sense, that dramatic tension which depends on the very fact that the acts and moral conflicts

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of the characters must find their solution by their own internal logic, are *not* predetermined or moving toward any ideal conclusion. (The Puritans, in spite of their long faces and severe dress, are optimistic because they have that bullying arguing mentality which believes that preaching at the other fellow must in the long run alter his habits and, I suppose, because a belief in predestination does imply that the bells of hell go ting-a-ling-a-ling for you but not for me!)

I will not quarrel with Mr. Cruttwell about the Puritans. I think a good case can be made out for the view that their influence on poetry in its necessary complexity, sensuous concreteness and passion, was bad, and that this was especially true of the influence of the greatest of Puritan poets, Milton. But Puritanism is not necessarily allied to a rational attitude and a rational attitude is not necessarily opposed to the tragic sense.

It is over the definition of the tragic sense that I quarrel with Mr. Cruttwell. I think that puritans are insensitive to tragedy because they themselves project the essential *Christian* moral optimism into its most extreme form: the wish and the determination that "All shall be well, and All shall be well" (for me if not for you). In other words I wish to maintain that the truly tragic sense is not Christian and never has been. The truly tragic sense is awareness of *natural* law and dialectic. It is concerned with error and its biological consequences, not with sin and its punishment or redemption. It refuses the extra-mundane implication and dimension of either of these ideal consequences. The moral conflicts of genuine tragedy are resolved in terms of themselves. (It is interesting that the greatest Christian poem, Dante's, which is full of dramatic incident and tensions, does not achieve the tragic form: it is a 'Comedy' and the happy ending is there, but intellectual and off the worldly stage.)

In short, the truly tragic spirit is Greek, not Christian, and Shakespearean uniqueness, not only among his contemporaries, but in European literature, which we are always trying to deny, though without success, because it baffles and almost irritates the theorizing mind, is due to the fact that his spirit is naturally Greek—*anima naturaliter graeca.* His interest in law and order is not fundamentally political and immediate but natural, biological and psychological. His great tragedies are about irrational violence done to natural equilibrium in the field of the mind and heart, and about the re-establishment of the balance of nature. The villains, the baffling Iagos, the Gonerils and Regans, in particular, with their apparently pointless malevolence, can be seen in this light,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

as the blind instruments of adjustment to the heroes' instinctive and inevitable *hubris.*

It has, I believe, already been pointed out that what Shakespeare acquired—or, I think, we should rather say, confirmed—from his reading of North's Plutarch, was a 'Graecian' spirit: and this, among other things, set him apart from all his contemporaries in their views on the meaning of 'classicism' and, in particular, from the untragic violence of their 'Senecan' revenge plays. Mr. Cruttwell's reminder of Shakespeare's undue sensitivity about his "want of art," then associated with lack of classical scholarship, is interesting. But it is consoling to remind ourselves that the Elizabethan idea of classicism was predominantly Latin—they learned about the Greeks in Latin. And over-Latinity, the actual 'monumental' and static character of the Latin language, probably did much to kill for them the fluid naturalistic spirit of the Greeks and to deaden their approach to the truly tragic spirit. Shakespeare's intellectual genius was what Robert Graves calls "proleptic." He knew instinctively what learning he needed to body forth his poetic apperception. Moreover if he appears to be in favor of political law and order that is because, with all true poets, he knew that "everything transitory is only a symbol." He knew instinctively that societies do their labored best to imitate natural law, to symbolize the natural creative and destructive processes which only the tragic artist truly *expresses.*

The Elizabethan 'Senecan' idea was not much nearer to tragedy than our newspaper use of the term. It is full of "accidental deaths." Perhaps the reason that we have no genuine poetic tragedy in our sad and violent age is not that we are no longer 'orthodox' or Christian-Tory. It may be that the age is too Senecan and insufficiently Greek, full of tyrants with a triumphant and immoral will to power who are secretly half-envied by their bewildered victims craving for melodrama. The true tragic sense is not rationalistic, but it may be an effect of rationality trying to understand and absorb the irrational.

Kathleen Nott

the hans hofman school of fine arts

52 west 8th street • new york city • phone gramercy 7-3491

winter session
personally conducted
by mr. hofmann

opening on october 25

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

TWO SOUTHERNERS

IN A FARTHER COUNTRY. By William Goyen. Random House. $3.50.
THE BRIDE OF THE INNISFALLEN. By Eudora Welty. Harcourt, Brace. $3.50.

Toward the end of William Goyen's *In a Farther Country*—an exotic decameron, or, better, shabby *Grand Hotel*—an evangelist-type woman provides this bit of information: "Lying in the brown grass, his brown body stretched out on the grass, I put pollen and seed in the thick glistening hair on his underbelly, where they shone in the sunshine like little sparkling lights. He did the same to me; was that a sin? He nailed me to the cross with his hammering; he lay me out lightly as the cross, arms stretched out, legs stretched out, and he nailed me to the earth with the terrible spike of love." While the content of this passage is not typical of the book, it is interesting to note that this strange mixture of sex and theology comes at the climax of a novel that has been leading up to something. The boy was seventeen and the lady thirty-five when it happened, and the lady had a twin sister who died mysteriously upon confronting puberty, and took beauty with her, and visited a sense of death on the lady. The lady then became a schoolteacher and eventually met the Mexican boy, who was destined for the seminary but, in the end, couldn't resist nature and the lady, until he died, which somehow laid the sister's ghost and reveals God's spirit projecting the beautiful face of ourselves through the dirty masks we wear.

Most of the novel takes place in a West Twenty-Third Street apartment called "Spain," reached by a built-up fire escape from a shop called "Artifices of Spain." It is presided over by Marietta McGee-Chavez, last living mistress of the "Colcha stitch," and recluse from the terrors of the outside world. Her guests include a sedentary enthusiast whose thwarted ambition is to dance like a whirlwind, a rotund murderer who dies on a couch and gives occasion for the wake which provides the stories that comprise the novel, an English poetess whose culminating thrill in life occurred when she spent a night pouring quarters into a machine that vibrated her bed, a patient priest and nun whose salvation technique is to let people talk out their obsessions, and others, all with gruesome experiences of death, near-death, life-in-death, all seeking to unloose the heart that is buried within our hearts.

And so Spain is a land beyond "Spain," "a place of joy shot through with the unworded sadness congenital to the human race." It is also

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

identified as "a place of silence where only the riffle of a fallen leaf, the bend of a blowing blade of grass, the dropping of one tear or the sounding of one measure of laughter, tells the last thing."

In a biographical note in the back of the book, Mr. Goyen declines to be identified as "a young Southern writer," since he is "full forty, from Texas." He goes on to say: "The themes of my work have no affinity with the eccentricities of Southern personality or Gothic bizarreries, though my work has been attracted into that category through spurious association." I'm inclined to make the association, spurious or not. The characters may not be Southern but they are certainly eccentric. Thematically the book is as Southern as you can get in the post-Faulkner school of Welty, Williams, Capote, McCullers, in that it is concerned with the wandering lost souls, the crippled of the earth, who cannot take ordinary life, or whom ordinary life has mutilated, whose illusions are matched against life to life's disadvantage. The moral always seems to be: judge not their actions, for all experience is enriching and saving, if it is consumed with anguish by passive innocents.

As for "bizarreries," the book is loaded with them, a talking macaw masquerading as a road-runner, named Alfonso King of Spain, a mandolin strung with a woman's hair that plays in the evening breeze, scenes that take place at night in the pet department of Woolworth's, the items mentioned previously, and lots more.

As for the style, it reminds me of nothing so much as medieval Gothic jewelry, encrusted and ornamented, the rubies and emeralds clutched in overworked silver or tin; or, for a modern image, romantic encaustic, shining dark reds and greens, with scratchy furbelows of eerie whites and yellows, the world in a night illumination. And this in spite of an affected simplicity, which unfortunately is constantly dolled up, as if true sentences had come to the author's mind, only to be smeared and bedizened. It seems to me that Mr. Goyen's real talent for narrative and description has been blurred by the influence of lady writers. It's as if his image of life were derived from Virginia Woolf's "luminous halo," resolved by some sort of religious impulse, and written out with the coagulated allusive chattering of Djuna Barnes. So for all its occasional richness, and daring, and sensitivity, the book seems motivated by a spirit that is in itself delicate, dainty, and so far as I'm concerned, dull.

The stories in Eudora Welty's *The Bride of the Innisfallen* are about as good as her others. The subject range is wider, but they are still hazy and humid, life seen in a disconnected dream which focuses

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

new books from

NEW DIRECTIONS

by James Joyce

STEPHEN HERO *a new edition*

The early draft for A PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST is republished with newly discovered sections of manuscript and a new preface by John J. Slocum and Herbert Cahoon. $4.00

NEW DIRECTIONS 15

An international number of the celebrated New Directions annual including exciting new writing from Sweden, Japan, Turkey, Peru, etc. This permanent edition (paperbound edition to be published by Meridian Books) includes an index of all 15 issues. $3.50

PLAYBOOK

Five plays representing the new vitality developing in the drama away from Broadway—by Lionel Abel, Robert Hivnor, Kinoshita, James Merrill and I. A. Richards.

by Henry Miller

THE TIME OF THE ASSASSINS

a study of Rimbaud

Mr. Miller has written a vivid new preface to this account of what the French poet has meant to him. $3.00

NEW DIRECTIONS PAPERBOOKS

Three Tragedies of Lorca Bernada Alba, Blood Wedding, Yerma $1.25

Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog by Dylan Thomas $.95

NEW DIRECTIONS 333 Sixth Avenue, New York 14, N. Y.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and fades, and behind it all arrives a vision of horror, or a spontaneous but unresolved decision, or else people grope for each other only to pass like ships in the night. There is the same sociological data, embellished beautifully when nature, interiors, or the life of the past are described; distilled and quaintly bottled when human motivations are involved. It is, of course, so artfully attenuated and so skillfully softened that it bears little resemblance to formal sociology and comes across as a kind of arcane wit, as if she could tell all she chose if only the pulse of life were not so feeble.

Her themes are familiar by now. A Northern lady and gentleman take an automobile ride into the Bayou country and encounter an isolated Negro roadhouse where things are popping. No harm comes to them, and they leave, somehow shamed by it, and don't have an affair. Instead they discover the insufficiency of each other, and themselves. Character portrayal is intended, but then again Miss Welty is always delineating the character of the empty, or the insane. In another story, two Southern ladies, made for nothing but ante-bellum life, hang themselves grotesquely when Sherman burns their home, but this one is that old Faulkner tale with the hot-house atmosphere, the compulsive but agonizingly deliberate action that is supposed to take on the significance of eternity, and was very good the first eight times Southern writers did it. The title story concerns an American girl who has left her husband and rides the night train and boat to Ireland with an assortment of talkative passengers whose chatter influences her personal problems, I think by making her recognize her need for the bright life and solace of strangers. There are others: a bunch of ebullient Italians going to Naples, a rather jejune monologue by Circe retailing her finely spun grief, several having to do with the somnolent luxuriousness and wonder of Southern life.

I don't much enjoy Miss Welty's work. She keeps evoking things as if I had experienced them and relish them. I tire of her endless descriptions of clothing and furniture. I enjoy the talky dialogue only to a point. I don't find passionate people as incomprehensible as she does, nor do I go for the unshakeable quiet frustration her characters are inflicted with. In short, life doesn't seem as difficult to get at as all *that.*

Theodore Hoffman

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

VARIETY

FOR GOD AND THE SUBURBS

The campaign managers of the New Orthodoxy have run through history, economics, sociology, political theory, psychology, theology and mysticism, but the only one to come up with a really new idea is Herman Wouk. He bases his case for God and the suburbs on the perfervid struggles of Marjorie Morgenstern, a pretty Jewish girl with a talent for dramatics, to preserve her virginity and bag a husband.

So it seems to me on reading *Marjorie Morningstar*.[1] (This is her stage name.) The only continuous action or principle of suspense in this 565-page work is will she—won't she? This goes on for 417 pages to become the longest tease in the modern novel until Marjorie is spoiled of her treasure during a total eclipse of the moon: "Her age was twenty-one years, four months and seven days." The seducer is Noel Airman (*luftmensh;* he was born Saul Ehrman), an intellectual song-writer from the Borsht Belt and Greenwich Village, some ten years her senior, who told her at the outset that he was not the marrying kind. It takes her a long time—and a long pursuit of him through Europe—to come to her senses about Noel. When she does, she returns to the States to marry a lawyer—decent man and steady provider—raise a family in Mamaroneck and keep a kosher home. Somehow, all of this is supposed to show that psychoanalysis is nonsense and intellectuals are bums, and that the accumulated folk wisdom of the Bronx and Central Park West is superior to sex, bohemianism, the new pediatrics, and the eating of crustaceans and pork.

This is, as I say, an unusual argument. The book overflows with a *Volkstümlichkeit* which, for some reason, reminds me of *Abie's Irish Rose,* and it has a number of pleasant schmaltzy scenes of a Bar Mitsvah, wedding and other family gatherings. It has an even greater number of *non-sequiturs* which are not nearly so pleasant, especially when they come flying at you from all directions, bent on demolishing Greenwich Village and Broadway by the acre. But there have been deadlier barrages. Wouk tries to keep it all on a more or less friendly basis, and you may enjoy being shot at. For the book is enjoyable and seldom hard to read. It is much like the movies in its entertainment value, full of color and splash, with bits for the character actors. The observations on bourgeois Jewish life, its pretentions and felicities, are accurate and amusing, and the slow-

1 By Herman Wouk. Doubleday. $4.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

motion studies of Miss Morgenstern's *demi-vierge* days are not without topical interest. *Marjorie Morningstar* is, in short, like any other successful object or product of popular culture; it is a commercial concoction, but a careful one, made not only to withstand but to thrive on disparagement. Over and over again we find ourselves enjoying things which we hold in utter contempt; our repugnance, in some strange way, provides sauce to our pleasure.

All the same, there is an extraordinary amount of faking in this novel. It comes in three varieties: fictional, wherein the two main characters, Marjorie and Noel, are rigged; sociological, in which Mr. Wouk lays down reflections on the position of the Jews in American society without having a thing to say; and ideological, in which the ideas place a greater burden on the reader's imagination than his understanding: the trick is to see what bearing they have on the story. These three aspects of the novel keep colliding with one another and produce a lively, though not always charming, confusion. The confusion is twofold: one part in Wouk's mind, the other in the novel. Still another difficulty is provided by the gamut of tone, which changes with the occasion, and runs from love-in-bloom, to cynicism, con, satire, burlesque, *haute monde,* and pastrami.

Wouk's sociological study is concerned with two generations of a Jewish family on the rise and a hint of the third. When the novel opens, the Morgensterns are living on Central Park West, where they have moved from the Bronx. Setbacks during the depression—Marjorie's father is in the feather-importing business—force them down a peg and they move to West End Avenue, to a smaller apartment, but close enough to the class standard. They have brought with them from the Bronx a good many of their original values, and these are now undergoing refinement at Mrs. Morgenstern's direction. The latter is ruthlessly parvenu, and opposes Marjorie on every issue that carries the least threat of her daughter's departure from the pattern of rise and respectability. Marjorie wins, but her victories are no cause for exulting; Mom is always right.

The vindication of Mrs. Morgenstern's judgment is the most fundamental operation of the book, everything contributing to this end, but it's hard to understand why Wouk should seek it. He seems to see her for what she is—a shallow, narrow, conventional woman, enemy of spirit, who fears life and uses her convictions not so much for the welfare of her daughter and family as for their defensive value against experience. Yet Mrs. Morgenstern is always right! Much of her credo is exposed to ridicule, but the alternative systems receive even rougher

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

treatment, and the final proof of Mama's pudding is given by Marjorie herself, who is shown eating it in Mamaroneck with a silver spoon. The significance of these reflections on the Jews, as far as I can see, is that we should all head for the suburbs, but be sure to pack along prayer shawls and philacteries. I am sure this cannot be what Wouk meant to say, but he says nothing else because he is faking. He gives the story specious overtones of concern with the Jewish "problem" and takes a position right at Mrs. Morgenstern's side—not because she is right (since we don't know the questions, how can we judge her answers?) but because it is such a cute thing to do. In this day and age, what more startling yet safer way is there to appear unconventional than by upholding the conventions?

The ideological overtones are just as phony. Wouk seems to come out strong for religion, chastity, the sanctity of marriage and the home, and against free thought, free love and Freudianism. But it is like writing on a window pane—turn your back and it is gone. Religion has no place in the story because no one is interested, though some of his characters go to synagogue. Noel Airman, who is cast as the Atheist, covers the subject, when he is not eating lobster, by trying to talk Marjorie into sleeping with him; and Marjorie has even less thought for God, perhaps because she is kept so busy untwisting her arm. No one shows the least sign of faith, and Mr. Wouk, apparently, is content to let the matter rest as an adjunct of "adjustment" and doing what one's neighbors do.

Chastity, one would think, is a clearer notion, no two ways about it, yet Wouk manages to fog this up, too. Purity, as a concept of soul or action, does not even get honorable mention. Marjorie has to be careful that the boys don't consider her a prude, and so she engages in necking. This seems to meet with Wouk's approval; activities the other side of the line definitely do not. It would seem rather dangerous for him to depend on lines in this case, as he is incapable of drawing anything so drastic as a clear-cut division of any other topic. But he does make it plain that sex is of secondary importance in the relation between the sexes, who are better occupied laying plans for a home.

The fictional conceptions are no better. The main characters, Marjorie and Noel, are rigged up to represent opposite principles, but here as elsewhere, Wouk's confusion and his failure to understand the issues he is pretending to raise leave everything in a heavy mess. Noel Airman, who winds up in the waste basket, is no doubt supposed to be the object lesson: this is the price one must pay for pursuit of the pleasure principle. But Wouk puts him down so rap-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

idly, it is quite probable that he has burned his hand. There is the synthetic name, the rejection of Judaism, the psychoanalytic double-talk, the cuteness, narcissism and lint of Village beds, which stigmata are meant to stand in indictment of the man, and the sophomoric philosophizing, intended to take care of his intellectual pretensions, to say nothing of his withered arm which, by special dispensation, may be supposed to have Freudian significance. At the same time he is so dazzling and irresistible to women that he qualifies as an author's own wish-fulfillment. Noel is handsome, witty, brilliant in dispute (or is supposed to be; actually he talks like a hairdresser), and endowed with a fair amount of talent and excellent insight into the Jewish middle class from which he springs. All in all, he appears to be worthy of Marjorie's adoration, and sometimes even a little too good for her. On the subject of Marjorie, moreover, he does much better than Wouk himself, for he is the only one within miles to come up with at least a workable definition of the girl. He has her taped for a "Shirley"—the kind who flutters under a false nubility, only to harden into the stone image of her own frustrated mother and prove herself inimical to all sweetness, love, and art. No doubt, Wouk gives this opinion to Airman as a measure of the latter's infantilism, but like many a child's remark, it sticks.

Marjorie is the biggest gyp of all. Let alone the fact that she hasn't an idea in her head (the only way in which Wouk has succeeded in characterizing her as an actress) and that she seems to be constructed of chewing gum, she is made to function in a rather dishonest way. It is up to Marjorie to show the shortcomings of sexuality as a principle of life. For this purpose, Wouk sacrifices her virginity and has her conduct an affair with Airman; but he might have saved the girl's honor because, from all indications, she is not qualified to speak. Wouk is so careful to keep her a good Jewish girl, a "Shirley," that he does not let her enjoy it; and it would be a fair guess to say she is frigid. I am aware that the establishment of such charges does not lie within the province of literary criticism; but it does lie within fiction to give honest witness to life, and this Wouk has, deliberately or through ignorance, prevented Marjorie from doing. Her experience on the night of page 417 consists in pain, shock, and "incredible humiliation," and her general disposition toward the subject is summed up in her view that love affairs give actresses reddish eyes, lead them to drink and late hours, coarsen their manners and speech and undermine their reluctance "to pose for underwear advertisements and nude pictures."

Needless to say, the opposition of Marjorie and Noel fails to pro-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

duce the anticipated clash of philosophies and values. It is more like one mist absorbing another.

In fairness to Wouk, it must be admitted that a novel in favor of any set of principles, let alone Orthodox and conservative ones, is a hard thing to write. One must be careful with the presentation of contrary evidence: too little, and the argument is loaded; too much, and it tends to steal the show. In general, the trouble is that virtue is never as interesting as vice. But even if the odds are 50 to 1, as they are in the present novel, where 417 pages are put against 8, a case can be made, and a fictional tension generated to support it, out of the author's conviction, and his deepest need to make his wish take on reality. But here is where *Marjorie Morningstar* is most fraudulent; for Wouk has used his principles only for prestigious purposes, not even bothering to state, define, or feel them sharply; his object was to sound like a serious writer and make respectability respectable. Nor does he write out of serious preoccupation with Jewish life, or its actual social nature; or out of a genuine religious abhorrence of what he considers evil. He simply chooses white, like a man who plays chess against himself. Assigning the worst possible moves to the other side, he stakes fame and fortune on a game he can't lose.

Isaac Rosenfeld

PERSPECTIVES USA

13

Circe	EUDORA WELTY
Charles Ives	H. & S. COWELL
Poems and a Story	ROBERT PENN WARREN
Football in America	R. DENNEY & D. RIESMAN
George Santayana's World	IRVING SINGER
Ernest Hemingway's Fiction	DELMORE SCHWARTZ
The Businessman as Philosopher	JOHN KENNETH GALBRAITH
Contemporary American Drawings	UNA E. JOHNSON

Book Reviews VIVIENNE KOCH • TELFORD TAYLOR • FREDERICK GUTHEIM

Notes on Recordings of Contemporary Music • ARTHUR BERGER

Letter from New York • F. W. DUPEE *49 Illustrations*

$1.50 per issue November 1955 $5.00 per year

Published quarterly by Intercultural Publications Inc., 60 East 42nd Street, New York 17, N. Y.
Address subscription orders to Paragon Mailing Service, 1 Lefferts Avenue, Brooklyn 25, N. Y.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CORRESPONDENCE

"AMERICAN-TYPE" PAINTING

SIRS:

I would like to comment on Clement Greenberg's article on "American-type" painting in the Spring (1955) number of PR. I agree that there is such a thing and that there are more good abstract painters in America than in Europe. But Greenberg does not describe "American-type" painting. He evaluates it too easily in a favorable light. He is very ready to tell painters what they may or may not do, without enough understanding of what they have done or are doing. Sometimes he says "we" when "I" would be more accurate. He speaks of "the easel convention" without being clear what he means. He says, "By tradition, convention and habit we expect pictorial structure to be presented in contrasts of dark and light or *value.*" This idea of value is widespread among, for instance, public-school art teachers.

Contrast of light and dark would be better called "chiaroscuro." It is no accident that there is the word, "value," which is synonymous with "worth." It is difficult to talk about it without the painting (and not a reproduction) before you. Adrian Stokes in *Colour and Form* tries to but fails, because he does not sufficiently realize that it is a matter of the art of painting, not of nature. But in reported conversations of painters, and in conversations I have had, I know that there exists here a true and I think very important concept that has not been written down, except inadequately by people, not painters, who talked with painters and may not have understood. What Greenberg calls in the case of Monet the suppression of value, is really an emphasis on value, through dissociating it from chiaroscuro. For instance, one color can vary in "value" but not in hue or chiaroscuro or intensity. Needless to say, it requires art to do this, and the effect may be of the greatest importance in the result. An area has as it were, different amounts of substance, or weight, or opacity, or some such thing, and this variation may be the important thing in the balance of the composition, and in this variation the form of the picture occurs. Fra Angelico was a painter who was particularly sensitive about this aspect of "value." Velasquez and Vermeer used it; but it is most frequently seen in French painting, from the fourteenth century *Pietá* of the school of Avignon, through Chardin, Corot, Courbet, Manet, Matisse, Vuillard, to Bonnard, who uses it unrealistically, that is abstractly, as can be seen in his painting that often hangs in the Guggenheim Museum, and that (though it has a recognizable subject matter,) is because of this, perhaps the most abstract *painting* (as distinct from art object) in this museum devoted to "abstract" paintings. The earliest examples of complete abstraction of this kind of value from chiaroscuro, after the Impressionists, that I have seen, occur in paintings by de Kooning and some by Reinhardt, where a red and green, or a red and red, or a yellow-green and purple, having the same (Greenbergian) value, as well as the same value in the sense of worth (unless it is the same color), make your eyes rock. Otherwise modern painting from Cubism to William Scott and Clyfford Still depends on chiaroscuro. Nothing much more has been done except to leave out a recognizable subject, a negative acknowledgment of the first importance of the subject.

Greenberg writes of the great influence of Kandinsky and German Expressionism on American painting. But Americans copied the faults of these models as well as whatever positive qualities they may have. For instance, Kandinsky, not understanding value, made paintings full of dead areas—usually the darks, which in both his early realistic paintings and in his abstract landscapes do not connect with the rest of the surface. These faults can be seen in both avant-garde painting and in the sort of realist painting that derives from Expressionism and is shown in the Associated American Ar-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BACK ISSUES OF PR

Now available at reduced prices—30c each (regular price 60c)
Any four of the following for $1.00

25 **JANUARY 1950:** Arthur Mizener—**Scott Fitzgerald;** Alfred Kazin—**On Melville as Scripture;** James Burnham—**American Business.**

30 **JULY-AUGUST 1950:** Geoffrey Gorer—**The Erotic Myth of America;** Raymond Aron—**Politics and the French Intellectuals.**

31 **SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 1950:** Randall Jarrell—**The Profession of Poetry;** Erich Auerbach—**The World of Rabelais.**

32 **NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 1950:** Saul Bellow—**The Trip to Galena;** George Barker, Horace Gregory, Robert Lowell—**three long poems.**

33 **JANUARY-FEBRUARY 1951:** Arthur Koestler—**The Age of Longing;** Randall Jarrell—**The Obscurity of the Poet.**

34 **MARCH-APRIL 1951:** James Agee—**The Morning Watch (a short novel);** Sidney Hook—**Philosophy and/or Agony.**

35 **MAY-JUNE 1951:** Elizabeth Hardwick—**A Florentine Conference;** William Barrett—**Fitzgerald and America.**

36 **JULY-AUGUST 1951:** Andre Gide—**Two Declarations;** Louis Auchincloss—**Edith Wharton and Her New Yorks;** Diana Trilling—**A Communist.**

38 **NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 1951:** Saul Bellow—**The Einhorns;** William Barrett—**American Fiction and American Values.**

39 **MARCH-APRIL 1952:** Randall Jarrell—**The Age of Criticism;** F. G. Friedmann—**America: A Country without Pre-History.**

40 **MAY-JUNE 1952:** Albert Camus—**Art and Revolt; A Symposium: Our Country and Culture;** Allen Tate—**The Maimed Man (a poem).**

41 **JULY-AUGUST 1952:** Ortega y Gasset—**The Self and the Other;** Francis Fergusson—**Auden in Mid-Career.**

42 **SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 1952:** George Orwell—**Such, Such Were the Joys;** Allen Tate—**Is Literary Criticism Possible.**

43 **NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 1952:** Walter Kaufmann—**Shakespeare, Goethe, and the Advent of Psychology;** Alberto Moravia—**Sunny Honeymoon (a story).**

ALSO: Oct., Nov., Dec. 1949 and all bi-monthly issues of 1953

PARTISAN REVIEW, 22 East 17th Street, New York 3, N. Y.

I enclose ..... **for the following back issues (insert numbers below)**

.....

Name .....

Street .....

City ..... **Zone** ..... **State** .....

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tists' Galleries. The German Expressionists misunderstood Impressionism because they did not understand value, and this provincial school bequeathed its provincialism to Americans. Cézanne did not, as Greenberg says, try to bring back chiaroscuro—on the contrary, he understood very well the form implicit to the originality of Impressionism. The Cubists, in so far as they based themselves on a remark of Cézanne, put literary content into their as yet incomplete understanding of him. (To speak of a literary content in painting is not to disparage its painterliness.)

Greenberg says the term "buckeye" comes from Barnett Newman. I doubt this—I remember hearing the term applied to bad painting thirty years ago in Chicago, and frequently since.

Greenberg says that Still, Newman and Rothko started as "symbolists," which means they started by wondering what to paint instead of how to paint—their first concern was with the artist's social role, and their painting has a literary origin. The way to get away from literature (if this is desired) is not by being negatively literary.

Greenberg says Rothko's opposition of pure color makes him think of Matisse. But Matisse shows far greater sensitivity to an abstract use of color by attention to "value" (not as Greenberg uses the word) than Rothko has shown.

"American-type" painting has in some examples, this originality: it starts from painting as a way of manipulating pigment with a brush: that is, it starts very radically from the implied proposition that a painting is the result of moving pigment over a surface. It starts from nature—the nature of work done with paint. You start from this: if you are an artist, you make art from this. It starts from the contradiction of a rule of the critic Wilenski, who showed that in comparing a Raphael detail with a detail from Sargent, that in even the smallest part of Raphael there was a "plastic" (whatever that means) form, whereas in Sargent there was just paint, which demonstrated the inferiority of Sargent. American-type painting starts from the inferiority of Sargent, with the notion that a painting is after all, this: just paint, and not illusion. It does not express ideas as often as European painting, and in this sense it is "purer".

Greenberg seems to think that the artist today must give up the figure: the figure has been done and nothing new remains. It was also done by the Greeks, but the success of the ancients was imitated, not shunned, during the Renaissance. American painters have not been supreme in figure painting; perhaps from shyness they have felt more at ease in landscape. There is now figure painting being done by Americans, but Greenberg doubts its validity, telling them in effect to stick to their old provincialism; and this misunderstanding of value is also provincial. American abstraction is a development from American timidity, and it is original; for instance a difference

Exhibiting:
ENRICO DONATI
RICHARD POUSETTE-DART
ALFONSO OSSORIO
Betty Parsons Gallery
15 East 57th St.

New Location
TIBOR DE NAGY GALLERY
24 E. 67 STREET

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

between American abstraction and European abstraction is that in the American form "there is nothing to look at," no center; as of the still-life on the table, the face in the middle, or the house on the hillside, which probably derives from one of the differences of American landscape, even American city landscape, from European landscape. However as a war is not won by brilliant retreats, so creativeness is not advanced by imposed limitations.

Fairfield Porter

Southampton, N. Y.

A REPLY TO MR. PORTER

SIRS:

One employs words as fixed by usage. "Values" is a literal translation of the French *valeurs,* which means, among many other things, the gradations of light and dark pigment by which surfaces are modelled or shaded into the illusion of volume, mass, and even depth. "Chiaroscuro," from the Italian, tends more to mean light and dark in the sense of degrees of illumination rather than of color. The distinction is by no means hard and fast, but chiaroscuro is associated more frequently with the massing of lights and darks and not their gradations as such. Values, however, can be present without chiaroscuro, but not vice versa. Values are more or less discernible in all pictorial art in all places and times once such art becomes more than purely linear. Chiaroscuro is supposed to have been introduced by Leonardo, but some authorities, defining the term with what I think to be excessive narrowness, make it Correggio's innovation.

Mr. Porter is being captious when he tries to pin "value" down to its meaning as "worth." What difference does it make? He knows what I mean. Everything in a work of art has worth; the question is how much.

Through most of his second paragraph I can't follow Mr. Porter. If he means what I hope, for his own sake not mine, I think he does when he writes that Monet emphasized "value" by dissociating it from chiaroscuro, then he is just juggling words and wants to have them his own way simply for the sake of having them his own way.

I wonder how Mr. Porter discovered what was in Newman's, Rothko's, and Still's minds when they were "symbolists." Doesn't he speak himself of "the first importance of the subject"?

I can't remember saying or implying anywhere that the "artist today must give up the figure" because it has already been "done" (here again Mr. Porter worries too much about what instead of how to paint). In my piece I indicated what I thought was the best painting being turned out in this country, and perhaps the world, at the present time. I was registering my experience, not laying down rules or issuing directives. There are no "musts" in art, at least not for the critic.

Mr. Porter has equally little warrant for saying that I doubt the "validity" of the figure painting now being done by Americans. I happen to find de Kooning's "Women" pictures inferior by and large to his previous work, but that's an *ad hoc* judgment that has nothing to do with anybody else's figure paintings, not even Mr. Porter's. (He should have named some names.)

Clement Greenberg

New York, N. Y.

New Yorker Book Shop
4 West 43rd St.
New York 36

Books
Greeting Cards
Orders by Mail

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

INDEX TO VOLUME XXII

	Issue	Page
ARNOLD, G. L.		
The Aftermath of War and the End of the Neo-Liberal Utopia	1	83
(br) The Private Philosophy	3	418
BABEL, ISAAC		
Di Grasso	2	234
BARRETT, WILLIAM		
(br) Modern Italian Short Stories. Edited by Marc Slonim	3	426
BENN, GOTTFRIED		
Artists and Old Age	3	297
BOSE, BUDDHADEVA		
Transformations (poem)	3	352
BRUMM, URSULA		
Wilderness and Civilization: A Note on William Faulkner	3	340
Berlin Letter	4	513
BUCHNER, GEORG		
Lenz	1	31
CAMUS, ALBERT		
A Writer and His Time	3	429
CHASE, RICHARD		
(br) The Emperor's Clothes. By Kathleen Nott	1	114
(br) The Modern Writer and His World. By G. S. Fraser	4	548
CHIAROMONTE, NICOLA		
(br) The Hedgehog and the Fox. By Isaiah Berlin	1	122
COOMBS, PATRICIA		
Gulliver (poem)	4	494
DEVLIN, DENIS		
Mr. Allen (poem)	3	351
DOWLING, ALLAN		
A Dream of Birth (poem)	3	353
FIEDLER, LESLIE A.		
(br) The Translations of Ezra Pound	1	118
(br) The Twenties. By Frederick J. Hoffman	3	412
FITTS, DUDLEY		
(br) Poetry Chronicle	4	542
FLINT, R. W.		
The Living Whitman	3	391
FRASER, G. S.		
(br) The Aesthete and the Sensationalist	2	265
GLAZER, NATHAN (see RIESMAN, DAVID)		
GOLFFING, FRANCIS		
The Alexandrian Mind: Notes Towerd a Definition	1	73
GREGORY, HORACE		
(br) Leopardi. By Iris Origo	2	283

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

	Issue	Page
GREENBERG, CLEMENT		
"American-Type" Painting	2	179
HAMBURGER, MICHAEL		
Heinrich von Kleist: An Introduction	2	222
HARDWICK, ELIZABETH		
George Eliot's Husband	2	260
(br) An End to Innocence. By Leslie A. Fiedler	4	552
HOFFMAN, THEODORE		
(br) Two Southerners	4	561
HOLLANDER, JOHN		
(br) Klee and Steinberg	3	422
HOWE, IRVING		
(br) The Literary Situation. By Malcolm Cowley	2	272
HSIA, T. A.		
The Jesuit's Tale	4	441
KAEL, PAULINE		
Film Chronicle	1	105
KAUFMANN, WALTER		
Art, Tradition, and Truth	1	9
Toynbee and Super-History	4	531
KAZIN, ALFRED		
(br) Hadrian's Memoirs. By Marguerite Yourcenar	1	128
KRAMER, HILTON		
Art Chronicle	4	522
LEE, ALWYN		
Something for Bradshaw's Tombstone	3	320
LESSER, SIMON O.		
The Image of the Father	3	372
LORCA, FEDERICO GARCIA		
Crucifixion (poem)	1	29
McCARTHY, MARY		
Theater Chronicle	2	252
MALRAUX, ANDRE		
Replies to 13 Questions	2	157
On Saint-Just	4	465
MARCUS, STEVEN		
The Stories of Isaac Babel	3	400
MARSHALL, LENORE G.		
Mexican Night (poem)	3	411
MERWIN, W. S.		
Learning a Dead Language (poem)	1	103
MEYERHOFF, HANS		
Through the Liberal Looking Glass—Darkly	2	238
MORAVIA, ALBERTO		
Portrait of Machiavelli	3	357
NABOKOV, VLADIMIR		
Problems of Translation: "Onegin" in English	4	496
NOTT, KATHLEEN		
(br) The Shakespearean Moment. By Patrick Cruttwell	4	556

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

	Issue	Page
POSTER, WILLIAM S. (br) Fiction Chronicle	2	275
RIESMAN, DAVID and GLAZER, NATHAN The Intellectuals and the Discontented Classes	1	47
ROETHKE, THEODORE Old Woman's Meditation (poem)	4	491
ROSENFELD, ISAAC For God and the Suburbs	4	565
RUDIKOFF, SONIA Among the Angelic Orders	2	197
SIMPSON, LOUIS Mississippi (poem)	1	102
SYLANDER, GORDON Everybody's Omnibus Review & Paris Letter (poem)	1	101
TRILLING, DIANA A Rejoinder to Mr. Meyerhoff	2	248
WALKER, AUGUSTA Allegory: A Light Conceit	4	480
WALTER, E. V. (br) A Program for Conservatives. By Russell Kirk	1	131
WARREN, ROBERT PENN To a Little Girl, One Year Old, in Ruined Fortress (poem)	2	171

LIBERAL PRESS, INC.

printers of

PARTISAN REVIEW

•

80 FOURTH AVENUE

NEW YORK 3, N. Y.

The fall 1955 issue of

DISSENT

features a study of the intellectuals & the 1930's by Harold Rosenberg:

Couch Liberalism and The Guilty Past

Other articles include: Collectivism Reconsidered by G. L. Arnold; The Folklore of Populism by Richard Hofstadter; Proudhon: A Reevaluation by George Woodcock; Middle-Class Culture in the U.S. by Harvey Swados; The "Guaranteed Annual Wage" by Frank Marquart; Murray Kempton's Book on the 1930's by Irving Howe. Also: Erich Fromm's reply to the critique of Freudian revisionism by Herbert Marcuse in the summer issue, *The Human Implications of Instinctivistic "Radicalism."*

Write to Dept. P, Dissent, 509 Fifth Avenue, New York. Subscription: $2.50 per year, 75c per copy.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NEW VINTAGE BOOKS

Seven more time-tested titles for civilized minds

THE VINTAGE MENCKEN, gathered by Alistair Cooke.

A wonderful collection of Mencken's writings designed to revive the old and acquaint the young.

POEMS AND ESSAYS, by John Crowe Ransom.

The author's selection of his best work, including a new essay written especially for this volume.

THE PLUMED SERPENT, by D. H. Lawrence.

A great novel of Mexico containing the essence of Lawrence's search for the inmost realities and forces shaping all men and things. Introduction by William York Tindall.

THE LAW OF CIVILIZATION & DECAY, by Brooks Adams.

A daring concept of history that preceded Spengler and foreshadowed Veblen, by the brilliant historian brother of Henry Adams. With the original introduction by Charles A. Beard.

THE DEATH OF THE HEART, by Elizabeth Bowen.

Her best known and perhaps most important novel, now available in a paper-bound edition.

THE ARMED VISION: A Study in the Method of Literary Criticism, by Stanley Hyman.

A brilliant discussion and evalution of the works of Edmund Wilson, T. S. Eliot, R. P. Blackmur, William Empson, and other leading British and American literary critics.

NO EXIT & THREE OTHER PLAYS. by Jean-Paul Sartre.

Four remarkable plays, including *Dirty Hands, The Flies,* and *The Respectful Prostitute,* important contributions to the contemporary theater.

95¢ each

For descriptive circular listing all Vintage titles, write to

VINTAGE BOOKS, INC., 501 Madison Avenue, New York 22

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Outstanding books from

FARRAR, STRAUS & CUDAHY

FIVE NOVELS BY ALBERTO MORAVIA

With an introduction by Charles J. Rolo. This 1200 page selection of the Italian writer's work over the past twenty-five years offers *Conjugal Love, Agostino, Luca, A Ghost at Noon,* and *Mistaken Ambitions* (*Le Ambizioni Sbagliate*), which has not been available in English for nearly two decades. $6.50

MONCKTON MILNES

A biography by James Pope-Hennessy. Milnes' private papers, exclusively released for this biography, tell the story where possible, but Peter Quennell points out that Pope-Hennessy "has shaped an enormous mass of material into a scholarly and well-documented, yet clear and entertaining narrative." Two Vols., Illus. $8.50

SEVEN BY COLETTE

With an introduction by Janet Flanner. A big handful (more than 900 pages) of the most beautiful work of one of France's finest writers. The collection includes *Gigi, The Cat, My Mother's House, Chance Acquaintances, Chéri, The Last of Chéri,* and *The Vagabond* in fresh and careful translations. Complete and unabridged. $6.50

THE SELECTED LETTERS OF HENRY JAMES

Edited with an introduction by Leon Edel. James' foremost biographer has made a generous selection of letters, half of them previously unpublished. Leon Edel has designed this selection to show the *kinds* of letters James wrote. $4.00

THE SHOCK OF RECOGNITION

Edited by Edmund Wilson. This anthology has been long out of print. A new introduction by Wilson and a previously missing section of an article by Mark Twain have been added to this 1300 page compilation. $6.50

BOTTEGHE OSCURE XVI

Edited by Marguerite Caetani. This distinguished review published in Rome consistently offers the best in present day creative writing. $2.50

Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, Inc.
101 Fifth Avenue New York 3, New York

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED